the weekly
Standard

APRIL 8, 1996 $2.95

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Tucker Carlson • The Editors

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ANDREW FERGUSON

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ANDREW PEYTON THOMAS

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With Enemies Like These . . .

If you can judge a cause by its enemies, the California Civil Rights Initiative is looking pretty good. Campaigning prominently against it has been University of California at Santa Cruz professor Angela Davis: Communist, Black Panther, gun-runner, darling of the Che-Lumumba Club, and recipient of the Lenin Prize.

Davis has been stumping the state with Eleanor Smeal, former strongperson at the National Organization for Women. They have denounced the initiative—which would abolish race and gender preferences in California's public institutions—and reviled its backers as brownshirts.

Last year, Davis was selected to hold the "Presidential Chair" at Santa Cruz, whose benefits include a $30,000 stipend and research assistance. (This is on top of the $68,000 salary Davis already receives for nourishing young California minds.) Could any of this taxpayer money, perchance, be going to support Davis's political activities?

It's good,of course, to see Angela Davis back in the news. But she does make right-wing satire more difficult. How, after all, can her official title be improved on? "Professor of the History of Consciousness in the Women of Color Research Cluster."

Right Meets Left

Students of "paleoconservatism" have long argued that the paleos' radical dissatisfaction with contemporary America could eventually veer into an anti-Americanism almost indistinguishable from the more familiar variety on the left. From an item in the March newsletter of the Rockford Institute—center of paleoconservative endeavor and source of intellectual firepower for Pat Buchanan's presidential campaign—it looks like the veer is here.

In the course of detailing the Institute's often interesting activities, the newsletter reports on editor Thomas Fleming's trip to Moscow to attend a conference on the Balkans: "Dr. Fleming argued that America was a great nation as long as it followed the isolationist policies of Washington and Jefferson. The current expansionist path of American foreign policy, he concluded, is similar to that of the U.S.S.R. in the 1970's."

Wow. Sources say the Institute's next newsletter will be devoted to neoconservative adventurism in the Horn of Africa and the recent American imperialist assault on the peace-loving Fidel Castro.

Meanwhile, Pat Buchanan seems to be following in the radical chic footsteps of Leonard Bernstein. Buchanan met last week with his advisers to plot strategy for his populist crusade on behalf of working Americans. The location: the Ritz-Carlton Hotel at Tysons Corner, Va., a pitchfork's length from the dreaded Beltway.

King vs. Farrakhan

In the six weeks since Rep. Peter King began pressing for an investigation into Louis Farrakhan's travels to Libya, Iran, and Iraq, the congressman has received four telephoned death threats. All of the callers mentioned King's Farrakhan-related work, and one said he would come to King's office and "put a bullet in the head of every white cracker."

You might expect this to prompt concern from some of the House members who are aligned with Farrakhan. You might think they would distance themselves from the death threats, or communicate their displeasure over the calls to King personally. But you would be mistaken.

Not only have Farrakhan's friends in Congress failed to say anything to King, they've turned up the volume against him. In response to King's work for a congressional resolution condemning Farrakhan's travels, Rep. Donald Payne (chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus) has charged King with being motivated by race-baiting and fund-raising. Payne also told *The Hill*, a Capitol Hill weekly, that "this whole

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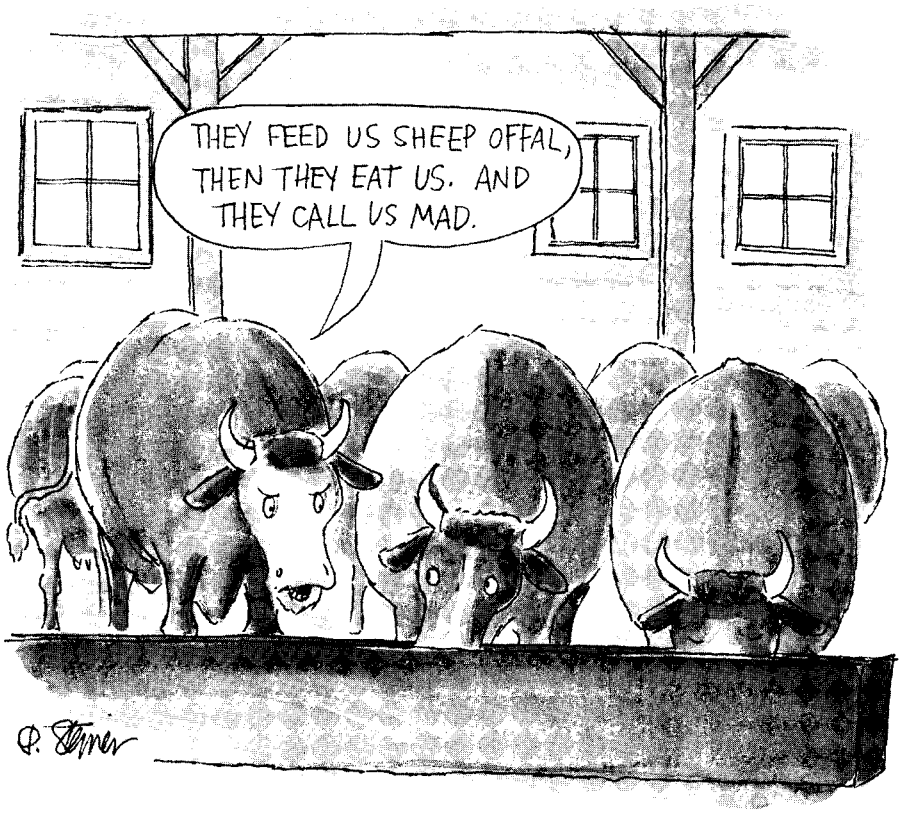

thing smells like . . . Willie Horton."

Actually, King's courage puts into particularly vivid contrast the cowardice of so many others with regard to Farrakhan.

Smoking Dope

Lawrence Walsh, famous as the world's worst-ever, least successful independent counsel, has slung another arrow at Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr. Walsh has been carrying Bill Clinton's political baggage for more than three years now, ever since he chose October 30, 1992—five days before the presidential election—to issue a dubious indictment of Cap Weinberger.

When Starr was first named to the Whitewater post, replacing Robert Fiske, Walsh dumped on Starr in print: inexperienced and too partisan, an altogether "terrible" appointment, he said. Now Walsh has done it again: on the front page of *USA Today*'s March 26 edition. Starr, it seems, in his private practice, represents a number of tobacco companies opposed to Clinton administration smoking proposals. Therefore, Walsh concludes, he has a conflict of interest. The connection raises "a question" about whether Starr is "corrupted" as Whitewater's prosecutor. No it doesn't. Unless you believe, as Walsh's argument implies, that Whitewater is a mirage created by tobacco companies intent on torpedoing Bill Clinton.

The Reading List

The Reading List was a tad chagrined when *Braveheart* swept the Oscars. How could men with blue faces storming fortresses in kilts top Emma Thompson's exquisite *Sense and Sensibility*? Yet so emphatic was the Academy's verdict that the Reading List felt chastened—and reminded of the enduring entertainment value of exuberant killing fueled by motives low and high. Highlights of a millennium of mayhem include:

The Song of Roland, anonymous. The 11th-century epic grandly recounts the ambush of Charlemagne's rear guard by Saracens as the army leaves Spain. The noble Roland, too proud at first to summon help, realizes too late the French have been betrayed.

Titus Andronicus, attributed to Shakespeare. Earliest and bloodiest of the histories. The title character has lost 21 sons in battle and personally dispatches another and a daughter on stage. Don't miss Tamora, Queen of the Goths, commanding her sons to rape and mutilate a Roman maiden; later the mother is served their heads up in a pie. Gruesome from first scene ("Alarbus' limbs are lopt, and entrails feed the sacrificing fire . . .") to last ("Set him breast-deep in earth, and famish him . . .").

The Scottish Chiefs, by Jane Porter. The story of William Wallace, of *Braveheart* fame, and an 1810 best-seller, even before the hugely successful Waverley novels of Sir Walter Scott. Your parents or grandparents may have been given the edition splendidly illustrated by N.C. Wyeth, back when young people were nourished on romantic tales of patriotic valor.

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Casual

The Timid Elite

When it comes to government funding of the arts, I support the Spanish Court option. Which is to say, I believe the federal government should lavishly fund the arts, but should also be able to determine content. The Congress could budget $10 million for a statue, but it would have to be Newt Gingrich on horseback; $2 million could go for a symphony, so long as it was a homage to the flat tax. The Rubens series on Marie de' Medici in the Louvre captures the tone of abject sycophancy I'm looking for.

So I was happy to go to a lunch sponsored by the American Assembly to conspire against my fellow conservatives who seek to cut federal support for the arts. The American Assembly was founded by Dwight Eisenhower and Averell Harriman, and it remains a holdover from when the East Coast Establishment really was the establishment. Even today, trustees are drawn from the Great and the Good, mostly moderate Republicans and centrist Democrats: David Gergen, former congressman Bill Green, Jimmy Carter's second U.N. rep., Donald McHenry. I knew this lunch was to be conducted by those deeply dedicated to public service because it was scheduled to run from noon until 4:30.

We met at the Century Club, which is the most beautiful club in New York and probably the one with the worst food. The 25 of us were to serve as an advisory panel to determine whether the American Assembly should launch a project to examine "Future Support and Infrastructure for the Arts." I won't keep you in suspense: The group decided it should.

In the middle of lunch my neighbor, former congressman John Brademas, handed me his six-page résumé (Was it rude that I didn't have one to hand him?), and I was reminded that there is an extensive network of organizations designed to bring eminent people together to offer sober reflections on the issues of the day. Brademas sits on the board of the Aspen Institute, the American Ditchley Foundation, the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Rockefeller Foundation, among many others. He has been active with the Carnegie Endowment, the Trilateral Commission, the Spanish Institute, the U.S.-Japan Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and so on. Brademas leads the emeritus life.

But these organizations are more than just Rotary Clubs for people who used to run the world. They bring together important people, and the idea is that through their discussions some product will be produced that will have real influence. Oliver Stone and Pat Buchanan think they have clout. But do they?

Averell Harriman lived in an age of deference, when a tone of hortatory banality and a list of distinguished signatories were more likely to attract attention than repel it. Ours is a more populist time, and dominated by broadcast media. The Rev. Al Sharpton may have as much influence as a basketful of commission reports. For better or worse.

The other thing that has changed is the elite's self-confidence. The American Assembly brought together an impressive group: the heads of many big museums and foundations and bright players from government agencies. But the discussion was laced with introspection and self-doubt, such as beset a religious denomination losing membership: The arts audience is aging, individual giving is stagnant, foundation funding is increasingly constrained, the hordes in Congress want to cut off federal funding, and even Clinton's budget reduces aid to the arts by a quarter.

Instead of marching off into battle, sure of their goals, many in the arts community seem to be perpetually retying their boots, making sure the lace arrangements pay proper deference to their various constituency groups. "We've been outlobbied and out-argued. We've been everything but out-philosophized," one participant said. And the discussion itself was hopelessly elevated.

I was an affirmative action baby at the lunch, the conservative, and like many affirmative action babies, I didn't deserve to be there. But maybe I should have raised my voice more to inform the group about the nature of their opposition. They're so introspective, they seemed uninformed about conservatives and trafficked in stereotypes. Some saw conservatives as 50 million ayatollahs in a massive conspiracy organized by Paul Weyrich. Others thought they could win Republican support simply by getting a few rich businessmen in their corner—the David Rockefeller option.

Maybe as establishments decline they preserve their good manners but lose their arrogance and ruthlessness. If Marie de' Medici had been at the Century Club, she would have figured out which among her Republican opponents could be bought off and which could be crushed. And she would have demanded a larger portion of chicken for lunch.

David Brooks

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Why Are Catholics So Wimpy?

The Vatican thunders against abortion, tyrants, illicit sex, consumerism, dissenting theologians, disobedient priests and nuns, and more. But walk into your average parish. Where's the beef? We get crumbs — and platitudes. We don't hear much, if anything, about the Church's teachings on abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, pornography, the indissolubility of marriage — "too controversial." Birth control and Hell are taboo subjects. Pop psychology and feel-good theology are "in." Sin is "out," prompting one to wonder why Christ bothered to get crucified.

Cowardly clerics, fearful of being politically incorrect or challenging the flock or offending some stray soul, keep the full Catholic message from us. In effect we're blindfolded — left to stumble in the dark, prey to false prophets and the sirens of the world, not even knowing why we're Catholic.

How long is American Catholicism going to censor itself, bow down before an alien culture?

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FACTS, FIGURES, AND SEX IN THE NAVY

Mark Helprin's review of my book, *Fall From Glory*, left out important information that would have benefited your readers ("Mr. Vistica's Navy," Mar. 25). Helprin implies that I relied on unattributed quotes from "bitter enemies" and spun a fictional narrative critical of Navy secretary John Lehman and other Republicans.

In fact, the book is based on interviews with Republican officials in the Reagan and Bush administrations—most of whom gladly spoke for attribution. What's more, the book cites newly declassified documents from the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Navy that support my reporting.

Helprin suggests that my 40 pages of footnotes are flawed or incomplete. As an example he caustically points to a citation of the "pope." As the footnote makes clear, the "pope" is Barry Goldwater's former aide, Barbara Pope, an assistant secretary of the Navy in the Bush administration. Like those of everyone else interviewed for the record, Pope's comments are documented by date, in her case, April 4, 1995. Helprin's claim of "undetailed, unquoted hearsay" is simply false.

Indeed, several individuals, including Lehman, reviewed and approved their quotations prior to publication. And Helprin fails to note that I praise Lehman for boosting morale and taking seriously the proper notion of civilian control of the military.

Helprin says I should be embarrassed for using the CIA's secret figures on the size of the Soviet navy rather than those of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. In fact, the CIA figures have proved to be more accurate than those of independent analysts.

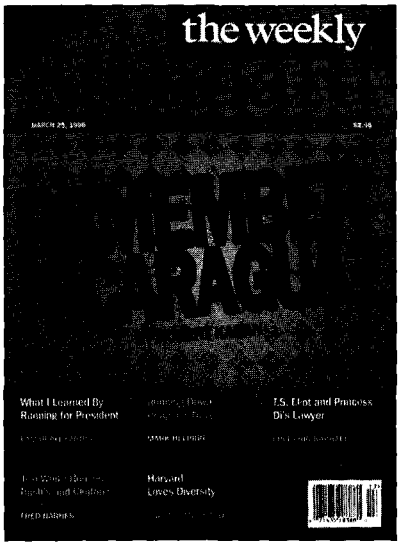
Finally, Helprin finds the details of the Navy's historic ill treatment of women unnecessary and prurient. Had these details, no matter how unpleasant, gone unreported, the Navy's intolerable sexist traditions would continue.

GREGORY L. VISTICA
WASHINGTON, DC

MARK HELPRIN RESPONDS: *As yet another slow, fat target drifts into the crosshairs, I am beginning to wonder whether I have a secret admirer at* THE WEEKLY STANDARD. *Anyway, I did more than imply that Vistica's book was critical of John Lehman. Was Ahab critical of Moby Dick? Salieri negative about Mozart?*

And yes, I do think Vistica's footnotes are flawed, in that he repeatedly cites sources without supplying the quotation upon which he bases his paraphrases and summations.

This is what I mean by undetailed, unquoted hearsay—that is, a report by the author of what someone has said regarding someone else or a question of fact.



Does Vistica really believe that I thought he was quoting the pope? The reader may judge for himself the accuracy of Vistica's contention. I wrote, "Most of the time the reader will discover a citation that says only 'Gordon interview,' or 'Pope interview.' (Rest easy, not the pope himself.)" I feel like the character in the film My Cousin Vinny *who says, "I shot the clerk? I shot the clerk?"*

What next? Vistica praises Lehman for being serious about civilian control of the military? The book is the literary equivalent of sticking pins in a doll: The doll is John Lehman, and John Lehman's sin is accumulating power as secretary of the Navy.

And then what is this business about using the CIA figures? The point of my criticism—and in a world that values truth it should be a matter of embarrassment for the author—is that he pegged the Soviet navy at a third of its size by counting only major combatants, while including all types of U.S. naval ships.

Finally, Vistica's last paragraph is that of a grouse indignantly ruffling its feathers, but if indeed the Navy's traditions are intolerably sexist he has not demonstrated that fact in his two dozen anecdotes drawn from 10 million man-years of enlistment in the period he covers.

That's what happens when you forgo serious scholarship for Geraldo journalism about bottomless dancers and rhinoceros penises. I didn't write this book. He did. And he gets the blame.

T.S. ELIOT AND THE POPE

In "The Tale of T.S. Eliot and Princess Di's Lawyer" (Mar. 25), Frederic Raphael tends to over-interpret and even obfuscate the subject of Eliot's anti-Semitism. Its outlines, however, are reasonably clear.

Eliot's anti-Semitic passages are very largely confined to *Poems 1920*. These are mostly quatrained poems burdened by conspicuous erudition, the latter intended, with some justice, as a slap at middlebrow taste. In these poems, Eliot uses his references to the Jews to indicate an alien presence in European culture.

Ezra Pound is the dominant influence behind these poems. Pound had urged Eliot to write social satire and had provided the models in his *Lustra* (1915), as in the famous "E.P. Ode Pour L'Election de Son Sepulchre." Pound provided invaluable editorial advice for *The Waste Land* (1922), after which he ceases to be a direct influence upon Eliot's poetry.

Cultural anti-Semitism was very much in the literary air at this period, as in, for example, Shaw, Chesterton, Belloc, Wyndham Lewis, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway. By the time Fitzgerald wrote *The Last Tycoon*, the Jew was his American symbol. The year was 1940.

I and others read the last passage of Part II in "Little Gidding" as Eliot's cleansing apology for, among other things, the folly of his 1920 anti-Semitic references:

At last, the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done and done to others' harm

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Which you once took for exercise of virtue.
Then fools' approval stings and honour stains.

JEFFREY HART
LYME, NH

I was disappointed that Frederic Raphael spoiled his fine piece by endorsing the tired but virulent canard charging Pope Pius XII with "cowardice" during the Holocaust. The pope's unflagging efforts to shelter and, yes, to save many thousands of Jews, efforts that were never questioned and were in fact routinely praised by Jewish leaders, have nothing in common with T.S. Eliot's "obsequious postwar decorum."

In 1963, Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* charged the pope with "silence" and even complicity during the Holocaust. In response, Dr. Joseph Lichten, then director of international affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, published "A Question of Judgement: Pius XII and the Jews." Lichten carefully describes the aid, covert and overt, provided by the pope, his bishops, and the Vatican's nuncios throughout Europe.

True, Lichten reports that the pope's formal statements were circumspect. This discretion came in part at the request of Jewish leaders who feared, quite reasonably, even harsher reprisals against the Jews in occupied countries.

Pius XII's own attitude toward anti-Semitism and Nazism cannot be mistaken by anyone of good faith for the tepid bigotry of Eliot and the English intelligentsia. In 1935, the pope (then Cardinal Pacelli) said to 250,000 pilgrims at Lourdes: "The Nazis . . . dress up old errors with new tinsel. . . . [T]hey are possessed by the superstition of a race and blood cult."

It may well be that, from our convenient vantage point, a spectacular confrontation between the Vatican and the Nazis would have been preferable (and certainly more self-indulgent) than careful labors to save as many people as possible. Maybe fear of reprisals, of a "greater evil," did not justify discretion. But blame has been unfairly heaped on Pius XII, who was, in his own time, recognized and praised as a peacemaker and friend to the Jews.

RICK GARNETT
LITTLE ROCK, AR

Frederic Raphael writes, "Eliot's obsequious postwar decorum was of a piece with Pius XII's concern more with Christian continuity than with Christian witness." It is ironic that while Pope Pius XI is usually stereotyped as having been strongly anti-Nazi for his encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, Pius XII is often accused of having been soft on Nazism.

In fact, when three German bishops thanked Pius XI for so plainly and outspokenly condemning Nazism, he said that the thanks were due to Cardinal Pacelli (the future Pius XII). It was the latter who strengthened the title from *Mit Grosser Sorge* ("With Great Anxiety") to its final title, which means "With Burning Anxiety."

In addition, of all the major powers, only Germany did not send a special representative to the coronation of Pius XII. His election was not received with favor in Germany because he was always opposed to National Socialism.

In the end, actions speak more loudly than words. Under Pius XII's leadership, over 85 percent of the Italian Jewish population was rescued by Catholic clerics, monks, nuns, and lay people during World War II. Pius XII saw to it that thousands of Jews were hidden in chambers under the papal residence of Castel Gandolfo. Thousands of others obtained passports and visas on Pius XII's order.

The head of the wartime Jewish Assistance Committee, Dr. Raphael Cantoni, stated: "The Church and the papacy saved Jews as much and in as far as they could save Christians. . . . There would have been more victims had it not been for the efficacious intervention of Pius XII."

Golda Meir, Nahum Goldman (president of the World Jewish Congress), and many other prominent Jews thanked Pius XII for his untiring efforts in behalf of the persecuted Jews. His record should not be besmirched through malice or ignorance.

FRANÇOIS L. QUINSON
GAITHERSBURG, MD

DIVERSITY ISN'T EXCELLENCE

Harvey Mansfield, in "Harvard Loves Diversity" (Mar. 25), maintains that "in the past diversity was sought for the sake of academic excellence; now it is sought at the expense of excellence." I must disagree. Stephen Steinberg points out in *Commentary* (Sept. 1971) that diversity was introduced in the 1920s for the explicit purpose of keeping down the number of Jews at Harvard.

Abbot Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard at that time, argued that geographical quotas were in the best interest of the Jews because the quotas would lead to assimilation, and thus to the end of anti-Semitism: "If every college in the country would take a limited proportion of Jews, I suspect we should go a long way toward eliminating race feeling among students, and as these students passed out into the world, eliminating it in the community."

Lowell believed that differences ought to disappear, that acceptance could not precede assimilation. Ironically, geographical diversity was invented to preserve ethnic and religious uniformity. It did not occur to Lowell that differences might be harmless or even beneficial. Preserving Harvard's aristocratic tone was more important to him than maintaining its academic quality.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
STATEN ISLAND, NY

Professor Harvey Mansfield's statement, "The other value most evident in American education today is self-esteem," moved me to consult Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary*:

"SELF-ESTEEM, n. An erroneous appraisement."

GALEN CAWLEY, JR.
BOSTON, MA

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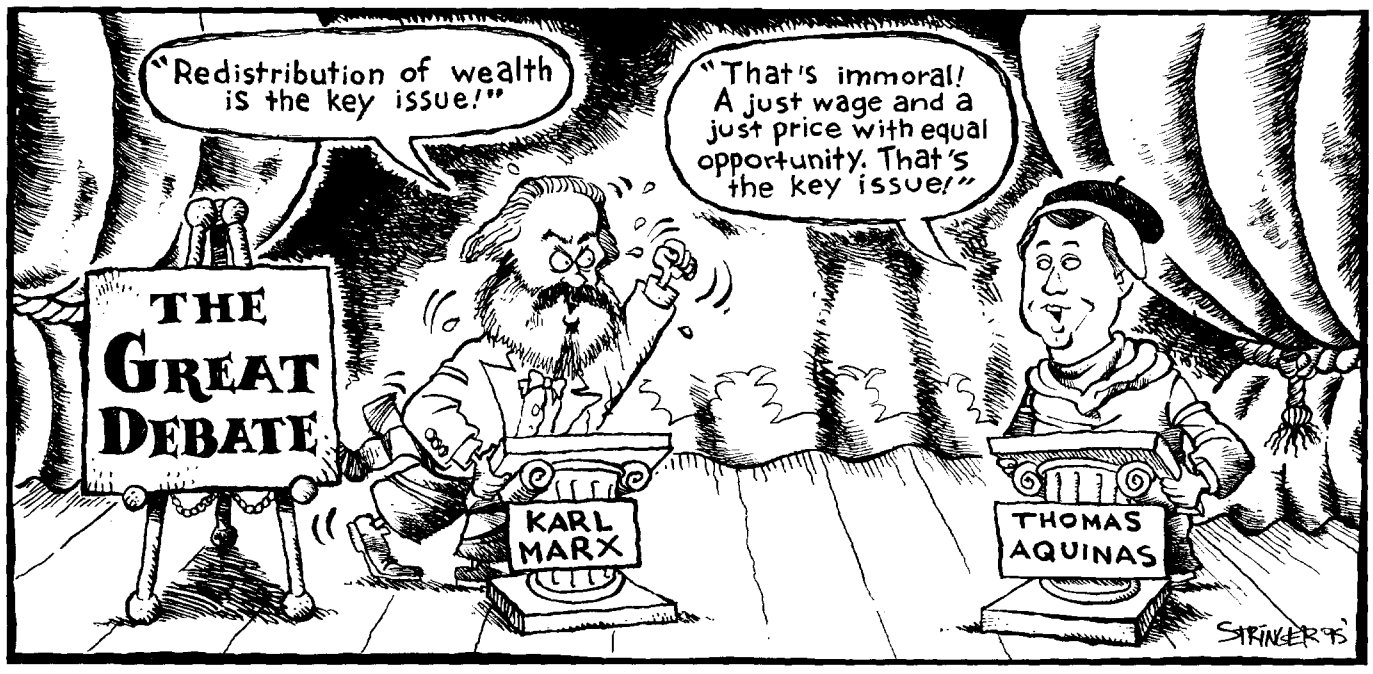

The economic dangers of class warfare

Anyone reading Marx knows he was a bitter, jealous man. He framed every injustice or inequity in the context of a class struggle—against wealth. Reinforcing this was his first-hand observation of the British "long lease." One hundred-year leases tied up property, preventing its passage to the middle class, causing many to flee to America—the land of (ownership) opportunity.

Redistribution or concentration of capital?

Class warfare has once again reared its head without consideration for its true economic consequences. The only economist to be canonized, Saint Thomas Aquinas, spoke out about the evils of attempting to redistribute wealth. He saw such philosophies as immoral and dangerous. He counseled equal *opportunity* with a just wage and a just price—not equality of wealth!

The concentration of wealth is a natural process of economic growth, benefiting society as a whole. The lack of capital concentration was the hallmark of the Dark Ages. Similar folly is Europe's Marxist socialism, which brands individuality, hard work, and success an evil to be tempered and controlled. The results are economic growth rates below 2.5 percent for nearly 30 years and chronic unemployment at 12 percent or more due to social, not prosperity, goals.

Entrepreneurial brilliance or design by committee?

When wealth is concentrated, investment decisions are more easily reached. When consensus is required, entrepreneurial fires are doused. Henry Ford reported to no one when he risked all on an assembly line, propelling America to the top of world productivity. Under Soviet central committees planning, economic hardship and stagnation dominated, thanks to Marx.

Aquinas' just wages & prices—the basics of economic freedom

Guaranteeing freedom of opportunity while preventing unfair monopolies or restricting competition is paramount. We must restore Aquinas' goal of a just wage and a just price. If we focus on these goals, then prosperity will result, rather than stagnation and jealousy.

Indirect taxation—a first step to renewed opportunity

Marx sparked class warfare; our government continues his plan via graduated income taxes. Freedom begins with less government intrusion through indirect taxation—not more aggressive enforcement of direct, income taxation.

We need reform rejecting Marxism forever: Fair indirect, consumption taxes ending personal income taxes as the Constitution intended.

For more information on the Princeton Proposal for tax reform & economic growth, contact:

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the weekly Standard

A Vulgar Spectacle

Behold the unharnessed *desire* that is H. Ross Perot: "Get me the fucking list!" he shrieked at longtime sidekick Tom Luce during a television shoot four years ago, as the poor man fumbled for some now-forgotten piece of paper. "Don't you understand? When I say I want something, I *want* it!" All of it. And all at once.

What Perot desperately sought in 1992, of course, was mass acknowledgment of his previously undetected significance in American public life—significance at a level generally accorded only to major contenders for the presidency. A bizarre conceit: On paper, at least, Perot may have been the least qualified presidential candidate in history. But as that year's events made clear, *perotismo* observes no ordinary rules: If Ross wants something badly enough, Ross needn't "deserve" it, and only an outright conspiracy can frustrate his designs.

Never before had the nation's political stage been hijacked this way for the performance of one man's private psychodrama. Today, four years later, that man is back. We may well be subjected to the same vulgar spectacle a second time.

Shadowy secret agents determined the outcome in 1992, Perot now announces on *Larry King Live*, always his favored venue for displays of full-frontal egomania. "Democrats were begging me to get out of the race" toward the end, he reveals. And people "at the very top of the Republican party"—the same ones who had earlier plotted against his daughter's wedding, perhaps?—"were begging me to stay in." Had voters not been confused by such webs of intrigue, had they been allowed to vote their "consciences," Perot insists, he would have won the race going away. The exit polls prove it.

Dark forces are again arrayed against him in 1996, he warns. "Dirty tricks" artists whisper that Perot's new Reform party cannot play more than a spoiler's role in this year's campaign and thus serves only its founder's vanity. This charge he heatedly denies. The party belongs to its members, he says. They are ordinary men and women repelled by special-interest-induced gridlock in Washington. The organized pressure of their fall endorsements will force the next Congress finally to approve legislation necessary to save the nation from certain collapse. And their 1996 presidential candidate will not be a spoiler—and may even be someone other than Perot. This "is not about me, Larry," he demurs. "It is about our country."

Not really. There has never been "spontaneous" grassroots support for anything associated with Ross Perot. He is now, personally, the biggest single "special interest" in the country—having already spent more than $75 million since 1992 to advance his "cause" in national politics, and ready with another $60-plus million for the rest of this year. But for this booty, the new Reform party would not, of course, exist.

The current Perot "platform" is a pathetic joke, a one-page chart of sentence-fragment "principles" that would embarrass the average student-government candidate in a suburban high school. Gone are Ross's Bush-era diagrams and graphs. Nowadays he mostly just gripes that the Republican Congress hasn't somehow magically passed its Contract items over presidential vetoes (without, it must be said, any help from Ross at all). And though Perot routinely claims that it was his followers' votes that tipped the scales in 1994 and actually *produced* a GOP Congress, little evidence exists to back him up. His endorsement is a feeble weapon—and maybe even a boomerang. In his own home state of Texas, former governor Ann Richards is proof of that.

So what, then, *is* the Reform party about? Its nominating convention won't take place until Labor Day, too late for the "winning" presidential candidate to attract sufficient contributions from workaday small donors. That candidate can only be a self-financing wealthy person, in other words. One who might just conveniently escape, in the five months between now and September, the kind of press scrutiny a formally declared candidate could otherwise expect. Whose particular interests does such a process protect? One guess is all you need.

Official Washington, staring habitually at its statis-

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tical navel, now pores over polling "cross-tabs" in an effort to determine how Ross Perot's apparently inevitable candidacy will affect the outcome of this year's presidential campaign. His support seems capped at around 15 percent in most voter surveys and increasingly comprises people in the demographic groups least likely to turn out on election day. From whose hide will this small bloc of voters come? Whom will Perot hurt more: Clinton or Dole? The most "sophisticated" such analysis, by Democratic pollster Peter Hart, says Perot strengthens Dole and weakens the president. Sixty percent of Perot's current poll support is "new," derived from respondents who say they did *not* vote for him in 1992. And among these freshly minted Perotistas, opinion breaks six-to-one for Clinton over Dole in a two-man field.

It's a clever and interesting numbers crunch. But it strikes most Democratic *and* Republican strategists as counterintuitive. A presidential reelection campaign is almost always a referendum on the incumbent, they reason. A three-way campaign this year will split the anti-Clinton vote. If Perot gets a respectable number of votes, the president wins.

That's probably the right conclusion. But it's right for a different, deeper reason—one having less to do with Perot's prospective draw from either major party and more to do with a Perot candidacy's almost *psychological* effect on the fall campaign.

American politics is now divided between a Republican party that succeeds by appeal to its more popular ideas and a Democratic party that succeeds largely by minimizing the importance of its less popular ideas and concentrating instead on the personal appeal of its candidates. Bob Dole may yet win an ideological campaign this year. Bill Clinton will win a campaign of personalities.

And here, Perot's daily, unavoidable presence in the campaign may prove the clincher. Perot stands for nothing. He will spend the campaign advancing the poisonously dishonest contention that both his competitors—each a reasonably serious man leading a reasonably serious national political coalition—are also empty vessels. That American politics is so much "show business," in short, its choices mere popularity contests. To the extent Perot succeeds in this cynical ploy, the quality and standards of American political discourse will be debased.

Can the Democratic and Republican parties do the right thing and refuse to permit this man, now serving almost exclusively as a totem for the chronically disgruntled, an honored third place in the coming fall debates? That's probably expecting too much. By encouraging a personality-focused campaign, Perotism advances the Democratic party's narrow, short-term interests. And were Dole to insist on excluding Perot from his debates with Clinton—a perfectly reasonable position, on the merits—he might open himself to unwelcome charges of ducking.

But the print and broadcast media need not even remotely entertain such partisan calculations. And if they do their jobs correctly, we may still be spared another degraded campaign. Perot cannot yet be entirely ignored; he is still "news." But he deserves a level of penetrating scrutiny he has still not quite received this year—scrutiny that anyone else in his position would automatically and immediately receive, scrutiny of the sort that ran him straight out of the race, at least temporarily, in 1992. Ross Perot is now, bogus denials to the contrary notwithstanding, a full-fledged, richly funded candidate for the presidency of the United States.

Should he refuse to answer pointed press inquiries in the next few weeks, Perot will prove himself to be, at this point in his tawdry political career, little more than Harold Stassen with three billion dollars: a sure loser, despite all the cash. In which case he will no longer deserve any press attention for the remainder of the year. Harold Stassen, after all, would never be invited to appear on *Larry King*.

—David Tell, for the Editors

Don't Wait, Govern

by David Frum

A YEAR AGO EVERYONE—Republican and Democrat—was predicting that by now President Clinton would be relegated to irrelevance and on his way to unemployment. Instead, the Republican Congress has been stalled by a very-far-from-irrelevant Clinton, and the Republican presidential nominee trails the president by up to 15 points in the polls. What went wrong?

An emerging consensus among Republicans and conservatives has already fingered the culprit: It's all Congress's fault. What went wrong, this consensus says, was that the Republican majority wasted too much time trying to cut the federal budget. Rather than sounding broad, uplifting themes like economic growth and moral renewal—themes that could elect a

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Republican president in 1996—the Republicans in Congress bored and frightened the public by threatening to cut Medicare, Medicaid, and other spending programs.

From a narrowly political point of view, this blame-Congress analysis may well be right. Had Congress contented itself with passing a big tax cut, slashing welfare payments to unwed mothers, installing the V-chip, and curtailing immigration, Republicans today might well enjoy higher popularity ratings. If politics is a game, then the strategy of the Republicans in Congress probably was every bit as much in error as the critics say.

But what if politics isn't a game? What if a political victory is not just a convenient jumping-off point for winning further political victories, but an opportunity actually to put one's professed beliefs into practice? Having been entrusted with political power by the people, could the congressional Republicans in conscience have continued to spend the people's money at the pace that President Clinton wanted to spend it? Could they have averted their eyes from the explosive growth of the two big health-care programs? What exactly do critics of the Congress think it should have done?

Michael Ramirez

We hear a great many warnings against the dangers of "mere budget-balancing." We've developed an entire vocabulary of abuse for congressional Republicans who took their responsibility for the public purse seriously. They have a "green-eyeshade mentality." They practice "root-canal economics." They're forgetting that "values matter most."

But the budget is not just a book of tedious figures. It is not a collection of accounting rules. The budget of the United States government is the place where political ideas are transformed into material fact. Are you worried that economic growth is slowing down? Tax rates cannot stay low so long as pension and health costs are increasing at a pace of nearly 10 percent a year. Are you concerned that too many Americans are quitting work to scrounge a living from welfare? Much of the blame goes to the casual way in which the Social Security Administration splashes disability benefits about. Do you dislike bilingual education? There's a line in the budget that helps keep it in existence.

So long as the Republicans leave Tip O'Neill's budget alone, they'll be running Tip O'Neill's government—and defending Tip O'Neill's values. The budget is every bit as much a moral document as William J. Bennett's *Book of Virtues*. Every time Congress takes a dollar from someone's pay packet to pass on to somebody else, it is making a moral decision. So long as Republicans remained in the minority in Congress, complaining about those moral decisions may have been the most they could do. But for a year and a half, they have possessed the power to do something more than complain. To suggest that they refrain from using that power in hope of winning the next election is worse than opportunistic—it is a betrayal of the electorate's trust.

The truth of the matter is that Congress never faced a choice between cutting spending and addressing social decay. The alternative didn't exist. Nobody has a convincing, comprehensive plan for addressing America's social problems. What Congress *can* do, though, is eliminate the incentives that Congress itself has created for self-destructive and antisocial behavior. It can stop taxing work-effort so heavily and subsidizing non-work so generously; it can return much more of the responsibility for our personal well-being to our own individual hands; it can eliminate perverse programs.

The real choice for Congress never lay between cutting spending and solving the problems of unwed motherhood, crime, and cultural degradation. The real choice lay between cutting spending and *talking* about the problems of unwed motherhood, crime, and cultural decline while timidly leaving the bloated carcass of Big Government untouched.

Conservative critics of the Republican congressional majority should bear in mind how modest the budget cuts voted by the House of Representatives and then the whole Congress actually were. A balanced budget in seven years hardly amounts to a draconian imposition of discipline. If even the modest incremental move toward restraining government that was

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attempted in 1995-96 was too much, if acting as soon as the Republicans had gained a majority in two houses of Congress was premature, one has to wonder: How little *ought* to have been done? How long *should* the Republicans have waited? Until after the next presidential election? But elections are staged every 24 months in the United States: If you delay until it's politically safe to take decisive and necessary action, action will never be taken.

And it may well be that this wait-until-after-1996 mentality bears more of the guilt for the Republicans' present troubles than any of the alleged excesses of Kasich and company. Pat Buchanan's disquieting success in the Republican primaries was fueled less by protectionism than by disillusionment. While Lamar Alexander ran strongest among those primary voters who thought that the Republicans in Congress had "gone too far," Buchanan fared best among those who complained that they had not "gone far enough." Buchanan ran particularly well among young voters: In New Hampshire, he got 31 percent of the vote of those younger than 29; Dole, just 18 percent. Among young conservatives, Buchanan was the only Republican igniting any real enthusiasm.

Why? Surely not because these kids are responding to the dark undercurrents of Buchananism. Perhaps it's because Buchanan remembered what the pundits who condemn the Republican Congress are forgetting: that conservatism in welfare-state America must be an audacious politics, a politics of large possibilities, and not just a delicate tinkering with a status quo that conservatives condemn, but don't dare to reject. ♦

Jesse's Issue du Jour

by Matt Labash

Los Angeles

What is it about Oscar? That bald-pated, gold-plated bugger, named after a Hollywood secretary's uncle, has gone from icon of excellence in motion pictures to patron saint of righteous indignation. Who among us doesn't recoil in horror recalling Marlon Brando and Sacheen Little Feather, Richard Gere protesting for Tibet, Vanessa Redgrave against "Zionist hooligans," Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon for the Haitian boat people—and now, the Protester di tutti Protesters, the Rev. Jesse Jackson on the "Hollywood Blackout"?

"Hollywood Blackout" is the new era in Tinseltown, so christened by *People* magazine, whose team of correspondents concluded after "a four-month investigation" that "the film industry says all the right things, but its continued exclusion of African-Americans is a national disgrace." Pretty stark for an entertainment glossy, so it must be true.

Which is what leads me to Holman Methodist Church in South Central Los Angeles the Saturday before the Oscars, where Jackson is presiding over a Mau-Mauists' Summit—half pep rally, half planning committee. Attending are John Mack of the Urban League, Maulana Karenga, the father of Kwanzaa in knee-length dashiki, and Sonny Skyhawk of American Indians in Film, bemoaning stereotypical portrayals of Indians as he stands there in deer-skin vest, dangling earring, and a heavily beaded bolo.

Jackson is in the back of the one-third-full auditorium. Not drawing nearly as well as the funeral next door, he looks a little frayed around the edges, with his receding eye sockets and an extra long belt playing peekaboo from under his potbelly. Still, he stands tall, mumbling the same three or four parallelisms and couplets numerous times within the space of minutes to nodding humpbacked reporters, who are on their knees if not prostrate but all the while managing to hold out their mess skillets for a dollop of trite-isms ("the product comes out of the process"; "America is a rainbow").

One rouge-bunny from Turner Broadcasting approaches Jackson, microphone off and eyes a-twinkle, to tell him, "I voted for you, I even wanted you to be my president. We're really looking forward to hearing you speak about justice and opportunity." He seems to take a liking to this line of questioning, as opposed to, say, mine: If black actors are underrepresented, as he claims, why does the Screen Actors Guild report that 11.9 percent of its membership is African-American (blacks are about 12 percent of the population)? "I can't uh—" he stumbles, while looking at a volunteer constructing rainbow lapel ribbons. "You should deal with other statisticians on that, okay?"

Jesse regains himself on stage, shifting from low-watt mumble to Sunday-morning-epiphany, scorch-the-nose-hairs-on-a-dead-man sermonizing that draws a host of "Ahhh yeah"s and "Walk through it"s, despite being littered with non sequiturs like why "blacks and browns" don't own Lexus dealerships, how Nelson Mandela told him he loved the *Cosby Show*, how Pete Wilson is worse than George Wallace, and, in a curiously racist-sounding assertion—how blacks do better in sports than in Hollywood because

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"on the playing field, the rules are fixed."

Mandela, Dr. King, Rosa Parks—Jackson hits all his historical marks, wrapping himself in the mantle of the early civil-rights movement, when real justice was to be won and outrage was completely justified. He recalls marching in Selma 30 years ago, where he first met Karenga, who, in his bubbling gurgle, outpoints Jesse in oratorical skills and applauds all his own best lines.

They work as a kind of injustice-seeking tag team, Jackson extending a hand to slap five with Karenga whenever he mentions Dr. King. They whip the crowd up while making assertions that seem less than grounded in reality. Jackson claims that during one of his many shakedown meetings with various Guild members and Hollywood elites (which produced the Hollywood Rainbow Covenant) a studio executive had the absence of mind to say minorities weren't being hired because of a shaky work ethic. Who would be so foolish to make such a claim in front of Jesse Jackson? He refuses to elaborate: "We'll have more on that at another time."

John Kascht

Jesse Jackson

Karenga is as hard to pin down. Because the *People* story and this protest were launched after only one black person was nominated for this year's Academy Awards, I ask Karenga, Jackson, and eight random supporters who should have been nominated. They have no specific answers. "That's not the issue," Karenga says. "The issue is whether there is a process in which [minorities] can participate and show that we have a multicultural expression."

In the world of Jackson and Karenga, process is everything. Processes can be participated in, and manipulated. Somebody's always doing the rigging, and somebody's getting rigged. For evidence of such, look no further than Jackson's own numbers, gleaned from the *People* story and put out in a press release. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has 5,043 members, and, according to *People* and Jackson, only 3.9 percent are black. The Academy does not make public its membership list, and when I called them, a spokesperson was befuddled: "I have no idea where *People* got those numbers because we don't even keep track of race. There is no race designation on the membership form."

So how did they get the number? *People* editor Jack Kelley in the L.A. bureau, who oversaw the "investigation," could barely swallow his indignation when I told him not even the Academy knew how many minority members it had. "That is a measure of how oblivious to the problem they are," he fumed. "Anybody who's paying attention these days ought to know that.

"The number was arrived at this way," he continued. "Our correspondents talked to several black Academy members, and there is a very strong network among them. They gave their best estimate of their membership. We gave the Academy the benefit of the doubt and went with the highest possible membership that we heard and did the math. I think the number could well be lower." Perhaps so, but they'd have no way of knowing. Since there are 13 different craft divisions, would a black producer, say, know every black gaffer? "Yeah, I think so."

Jackson was unperplexed about the guesswork that led to the oh-so-precise 3.9 percent. "You would assume a magazine as credible as *People* would have reliable information, so we should assume so. . . . The Academy gets a product that comes from a process."

There is plenty that is laughable in the *People* story (and hence, Jackson's press release). *People* implies racism was responsible for Whitney Houston's being passed over for her critically undistinguished performance in *Waiting to Exhale*, and implies racism was responsible for *Vanity Fair*'s having featured only one black actor—Will Smith—on the cover of its Hollywood issue. (There were only 10 actors on the cover—the closest proportionate representation they could have to 12 percent short of finding a 2 percent black actor.)

And there is also this blindingly obvious truth about the Hollywood "process": It is a market-driven meritocracy, where an entertainer who scores big will be rewarded accordingly. Comb the *Forbes* Top 40

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Wealthiest Entertainers for the last 10 years, and you'll find proportional representation. In 1994, 5 out of the 40 entertainers were black, with a black woman, Oprah Winfrey, heading the list. In '92, there were 8 blacks in the top 40 (20 percent), and three in the top 10, with Cosby and Oprah holding the one and two spots. Even in *Forbes*'s first list nearly a decade ago, 4 of the top 10 were black.

What nobody can ever measure, of course, is how many aspirants (actors, directors, writers) are trying to break in. This makes most arguments about numbers futile—and indeed, one suspects that the numbers are probably beside the point for Jackson. There's no time for reflection when you live by the credo "Turn on the heat, and don't ever turn it off." He spoke those words to Al Sharpton nearly 30 years ago, and these days, Jackson's about as shameless as Sharpton (though without the portly reverend's good humor).

When I suggested to Jackson's political director Frank Watkins that Jackson was a Cause Barnacle, an opportunist looking to glom on to any issue du jour, he replied with candor, "Guilty as charged. He takes advantage of every opportunity to advance the cause of social and racial justice. He exploits these occasions. . . His secret is to keep people agitating."

Jackson's protests are seldom a spontaneous burst of passion or conviction. It's more of a science really. Watkins neatly distills it into a six-step program, which, in Jacksonian fashion, rhymes. First there's Research (requires the least amount of time), then Education, Negotiation, Confrontation, Reconciliation, and Implementation.

Confrontation, it must be said, isn't what it used to be. On Oscar night, as Hollywood glitterati greased their delicate gullets with tempura shrimp in wasabi cream and marinated artichokes in white truffle vinaigrette, Jackson and about 120 people (not counting media) marched on a street in East Hollywood, around a sleepy ABC affiliate (symbol of the Oscars, since ABC televised the ceremony). On the side, leaning up against an Audi 5000, Roland Poet X, an original Black Panther in full regalia, was talking about how there'd never be revolution in this country—not like the days when they packed Molotovs with soap powder to make the burning liquid stick to anything, and took out bike cops with fishing wire.

Two knuckle-draggers from the Jewish Defense League were screaming themselves foamy from behind the police tape ("Jesse, come back to Hymietown!"), while nose-ringed revolutionaries in Crenshaw buba suits and full Cleopatra-Jones coifs were setting off Radio Shack bullhorn sirens in the antagonists' ears.

Roland sold me a rainbow ribbon and his poetry book. His black beret caught a weary Jackson's eye as he smiled at Roland, giving the thumbs up sign. Roland obliged back, but mourned, "We don't have any true leaders, all these guys are opportunists."

When I framed Jesse as such to former NFL great Jim Brown at a post-Oscar party, he shrugged his shoulders and gritted his teeth. "Jesse will be Jesse. That's all I'm gonna say." Perhaps writer Russ Myers said it best in the *Los Angeles Times*—that it's easy to understand why Jackson is upset with the movie industry. "After all, he hasn't had a meaningful role in years." ♦

Bench Players

by Matthew Rees

Touring San Quentin prison in California on March 23, Bob Dole highlighted a budding theme of his presidential campaign: Bill Clinton's liberal judicial appointments. "We don't need judges who try to find excuses for more criminal behavior," Dole said, and he called on Judge Harold Baer, a Clinton appointee, to resign or be impeached for dismissing as evidence 80 pounds of heroin and cocaine found in the possession of a confessed drug dealer. Four days earlier, Dole had said that judicial selection underscores the difference between him and Clinton: "It's a choice between a candidate who will appoint conservative judges to the court and a candidate who appoints liberal judges who bend the law to let drug dealers go free." Once Dole is in the White House, "liberal judges need not apply."

The Clinton judiciary, says a Dole campaign aide, will become a "very, very important issue" in the general election. Dole previewed his talking points in a December 26 op-ed in the *Houston Chronicle*. He deplored judicial micromanagement of prisons, the threat to the right-leaning Supreme Court posed by Clinton's reelection, and the White House's making "diversity, not quality, the centerpiece of the selection process." Dole has also suggested curtailing the American Bar Association's role in rating judicial nominees and has sponsored legislation curbing prisoners' ability to file repeated lawsuits. He summarized his case in a December 22 op-ed in the *Washington Times*: "Few

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events can do more to shake the public's confidence in our justice system than a federal judge overstepping his constitutional authority and legislating his own ideological agenda from the bench."

Dole has allies in making Clinton's judges an issue. House speaker Newt Gingrich has repeatedly called on Judge Baer to resign. He has also been circulating a mid-March George Will column excoriating Clinton's judicial appointments. Other top Republicans talk of turning Baer into this year's Willie Horton. And eager beavers at the Dole campaign are scouring the dockets for more examples of outlandish rulings by Clinton appointees.

This may work for Republicans. In the latest CBS/*New York Times* poll, crime was cited as the second most important problem facing the country. Karlyn Bowman, a public-opinion expert at the American Enterprise Institute, reckons the judiciary "is a good issue that differentiates Republicans from Democrats." Still, a sharper contrast is needed. A March Gallup poll shows little difference in approval ratings between Dole and Clinton on crime.

Baer may change that. He is the Clinton-appointed New York judge who made national headlines in January when he excluded from court $4 million worth of drugs found in a suspect's car. Her confession notwithstanding, Baer argued that the police who arrested the woman lacked "reasonable" grounds for stopping her, even though they had observed four men loading her car with duffel bags at 5 a.m. in a drug-infested neighborhood of New York.

THE WHITE HOUSE IS TRYING TO PROTECT ITSELF FROM THE CHARGE THAT LIBERAL JUDGES ARE SOFT ON CRIME. IT WILL BE A HARD SELL.

After two months of negative publicity, the White House responded. On March 27, White House counsel Jack Quinn published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* defending the administration's judicial appointments and describing two cases in which Reagan and Bush judges reversed convictions in similar cases of seemingly clear-cut guilt. The same day, Lloyd Cutler, a former White House counsel to Clinton, wrote in the *Washington Post* that the Clinton administration shouldn't be blamed for Baer because senators, not the president, have "the decisive voice in who gets appointed to the federal district courts." The Quinn/Cutler offensive came on the heels of White House spokesman Michael McCurry's March 21 statement that the administration might ask Baer to resign if he didn't reverse his decision. That threat drew criticism—including a statement of protest from four appellate judges (who also chastized Dole for suggesting impeachment)—and was not repeated. But Quinn asserted in a March 22 letter to Rep. Bill McCollum, chairman of the House subcommittee on crime, that the president considered Baer's decision "grievously wrong" and would direct the Justice Department to appeal it.

The White House is wise to seek inoculation from the effects of the Baer episode, but Dole and the GOP have other judges they will try to hang around Clinton's neck. Among the likely poster children are Lee Sarokin of New Jersey, Rosemary Barkett of Florida, Guido Calabresi of Connecticut, and James Beaty of North Carolina, all of whom have handed down egregious decisions. There could be more to come. Clint Bolick of the Institute for Justice in Washington is the author of a forthcoming study revealing "striking" differences between Clinton judges and Reagan/Bush judges on crime and civil rights.

A looming embarrassment for the administration is Charles "Bud" Stack of Florida, whose nomination to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is pending before the Judiciary Committee. Stack is loaded with problems: He's a personal-injury lawyer with no judicial experience who raised $7 million for Clinton in the 1992 presidential campaign (big fund-raisers are usually made ambassadors, not judges). Moreover, he's been a member of Miami's exclusive Riviera Country Club; Kenneth Ryskamp's membership in the same club sank his confirmation for a seat on the 11th Circuit in 1991. Stack's problems have escalated since his February 28 Judiciary Committe hearing. When asked to comment on the Supreme Court's celebrated *Adarand* decision, he said he knew nothing about it. And his most memorable response to questions on the Baer issue was, "I oppose crime and I also support the Constitution."

But launching a campaign against Clinton's judges from the Senate could be problematic. Even though Stack has some Republicans (including Dole) salivating, the Judiciary Committee chairman, Orrin Hatch, would prefer not to turn Stack's nomination into a political issue. Another member of the committee, Jon Kyl of Arizona, says, "It's in everybody's best interests to turn the temperature down" on the issue. "I don't like public spectacles. . . . I think we're above that."

There are other problems with the Republican assault on the Clinton judiciary. With so many Republican-appointed judges on the bench, Democrats are poised to publicize some judgments by Reagan and Bush judges. Moreover, Senate Republicans are vulnerable to the charge that they haven't adequately

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exercised their power to "advise and consent." Tom Jipping at the Washington-based Free Congress Foundation points out that not a single Clinton judicial nominee has been defeated, and 181 of 183 lower-court nominations have been approved without floor debate. Senate Republicans argue it's not their role to block White House judicial nominations, except in extreme cases. (There were only three public fights over judges during the Bush administration.) Perhaps so, but the belated nature of Dole's attention to Clinton judges could undermine his effectiveness in making them a campaign theme.

One of the wild cards is Hatch. Since Republicans took control of the Senate, Clinton's judicial nominees have actually been approved slightly *faster* than they were by a Democratic Senate. This irritates Dole, who has raised the issue with Hatch. Dole recently told a Hearst newspaper reporter that Hatch has been "too good" about "pushing" Clinton's judicial nominations. Hatch says he has received "a lot of pressure to shut the system down" but will work to keep it moving.

Hatch's efficiency is attributed to his cordial, back-channel partnership with the White House. Both Abner Mikva, former counsel to President Clinton, and Eleanor Acheson, an assistant attorney general who handles judicial selection, acknowledge that the administration works closely with Hatch. Hatch says this relationship has enabled him to veto preemptively "several" candidates considered for judicial nominations, which explains why prominent legal liberals like Peter Edelman, Laurence Tribe, Walter Dellinger, Kathleen Sullivan, and Cass Sunstein—all of whom would provoke fights—have never been nominated. Predictably, Mikva has only praise for Hatch.

The chairman's cooperation with the White House makes conservatives like Jipping cringe, but Dole needn't worry about Hatch's straying off the reservation. In the past six weeks, Hatch has delivered three floor statements highly critical of Clinton's appointments, and he says more should be expected. On March 25, Hatch blasted Baer as "one of President Clinton's lasting legacies" and criticized five other Clinton appointees by name. Hatch says his approach in coming months will be "to try to do an apolitical job" as chairman without giving too much leeway to Clinton's "left-wing crazies."

If Dole can tie some of the "crazies" to Clinton—and he should be able to—he's got a powerful message. But the White House will fight fire with fire. "We are not going to take this lying down," warned Quinn in the *New York Times*. "We give as good as we get." Should be interesting. ♦

Punishment Is a Language

by William Tucker

On March 14, Kathleen Weinstein, a 45-year-old special education teacher in Middletown, New Jersey, stopped to buy a sandwich on her way to take a graduate-course exam. When she returned to the parking lot, she was forced into her car by a youth who claimed he had a gun.

Unknown to the young assailant, Mrs. Weinstein had a voice-activated tape recorder in her purse. For the next half-hour, the machine recorded their conversation as they rode around Toms River and it became increasingly obvious the youth intended to kill her.

"You haven't done anything yet," she reasoned with him. "All you have to do is let me go and take my car."

As the tension wore on, Weinstein became more personal. She told her abductor of her six-year-old son and the foster child she and her husband hoped to take in. "I want to give something to somebody . . . give something back."

It was to no avail. The youth took her to a remote wooded area and smothered her with her own coat. He didn't notice the tape recorder.

Three days later, a hiker found the body. Mrs. Weinstein had carefully solicited details about the youth—his first name, his age, where he went to school, what his father and mother did for a living. The search quickly led to Michael LaSane, a 17-year-old living in a South Toms River housing project. When arrested he was in possession of Mrs. Weinstein's car. He had told everyone he bought it for $1,500 for his birthday.

A cut-and-dried case of felony murder? Not so fast. The day after the story broke, the *New York Times* sounded what will undoubtedly be the theme of the defense: "Abduction Suspect Wanted a Car, But Would He Kill for It?" Describing LaSane as "an average teenager who liked to play basketball," the story quoted numerous friends, relatives, and schoolmates pondering whether LaSane was really capable of such a horrible act.

"I think somebody is playing him for a sucker," ventured one acquaintance. "He bought the car from someone who is letting him pay for the crime."

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"None of us want to believe that any student in our community is capable of something like this," lamented his high school principal.

Have we been down this road before? We certainly have. Two years ago, in an almost identical case, Edward Summers, a 22-year-old Bronx college student, took a bus to a shopping mall in suburban Rockland County and hijacked a jeep from two Nyack teenagers, Michael Falcone and Scott Nappi. Holding the pair at gunpoint, Summers assured them over and over, "I'm not going to hurt you." Then he drove them to a secluded area and shot both in the head.

Miraculously, Nappi survived. He made it to a neighboring house and called the police. The jeep was spotted on the Bronx River Parkway. Summers fled the car but was captured after a wild chase through the woods.

Another cut-and-dried case? Not at all. Summers, who had apparently watched a lot of television, had a ready alibi. He had been forced into the whole carjacking by "Dino," a mysterious drug lord who supposedly held his entire neighborhood in thrall. Summers couldn't even provide a physical description of Dino, who supposedly was at his side during the entire crime. But the name had a nice Italian ring to it and conjured up visions of the Mob.

Portions of the New York press went for it, hook, line, and sinker. Right on cue, the *Times* sounded the inevitable question: Why would such a promising young man kill someone just for a car? Two months before the trial began, *New York* magazine ran a cover portrait of Summers, together with an "exclusive jailhouse interview" that lovingly detailed his alibi and mocked Rockland County prosecutors for not trying to find the mysterious Dino. (That Nappi, the surviving witness, testified repeatedly that Summers acted alone made no impression on the editors.)

The aftermath was instructive. At the trial, the defense actually produced a 42-year-old Bronx barber named Deno, who testified as a friendly witness. Although he professed no knowledge of the crime, he was put on the stand to prove that police had not checked out all the possible Dinos in the Bronx. Then, in a sensational move, Summers's attorneys wound up their case by charging that the friendly barber was in fact the Dino who had forced Summers to commit the crime. Members of the jury nearly fell out of their chairs laughing and convicted Summers on all 23 counts in an hour and 20 minutes.

Mrs. Weinstein's killer will probably not get away with it, either. (Although don't be too sure. In Florida a few years ago, the tape of a murder, accidentally recorded on a telephone answering machine, was ruled inadmissible because it unconstitutionally invaded the defendant's privacy.) But the real question posed by these cases is, Why does the liberal press, and the popular culture in general, have such a difficult time acknowledging that feral young men are committing such brutal crimes?

They do, of course, every day. Only days after Mrs. Weinstein's murder, an African immigrant supporting a wife and family was shot in front of his house in Queens by two teenagers who wanted—his car. The price of a human life has been bid down as low as a leather jacket or a pair of designer sunglasses. This is exactly what liberals and media fantasizers refuse to face.

IF MRS. WEINSTEIN HAD NOT HAD A TAPE RECORDER IN HER POCKET, WOULD MICHAEL LASANE BE FACING MURDER CHARGES? NOT LIKELY.

The simple calculus is this: With murder no longer punishable by death in most parts of the country, an armed robber can improve his chances of getting away with his crime by killing the victim.

Commit a robbery, and you let yourself in for three years in prison, the median time served according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics; rape will get you five years. So what happens if you eliminate the principal witness to your crime? According to the BJS, the median time actually served for murder in this country is now eight years. Despite all the "life sentences" being handed down, the real risk is roughly doubling a short prison stay.

Now look at the advantages. By murdering your victim, you greatly increase the chances that there will be no one to alert the police or eventually testify against you. Fewer than half the felony murders in this country are ever solved. If Mrs. Weinstein had not had a tape recorder in her pocket, would Michael LaSane be facing murder charges? Not likely. If Edward Summers had been more professional and finished off Scott Nappi, would he still be in college? Without a doubt.

Early criminal reformers were exquisitely aware of the need to draw a bright line between robbery and murder. "It is a great abuse amongst us to condemn to the same punishment a person that only robs on the highway and another who robs and murders," wrote Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). "Surely, for the public security, some difference should be made in the punishment. . . . In Russia, where the

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punishment of robbery and murder is the same, they always murder. The dead, they say, tell no tales."

In America, this view was taken to heart. In most states throughout our history, felonies and felony murder were differentiated. "Crimes of passion"—murders of relatives or friends in the course of arguments—were punishable by prison sentences. Murders committed in the course of other crimes were punishable by death. The last person executed in New York state was a petty criminal who robbed an East Harlem bar. One woman was slow in handing over her pocketbook, and he shot her in the head. A routine crime today, hardly worth note in the newspapers, but in 1963 it got you the electric chair.

John Coughlin, a retired New York City police detective, often speaks out for the death penalty. He should know. As a rookie patrolman in the 1950s, he spent several years protecting store owners along Brooklyn's Flatbush Avenue. "At the time, we were allowed to stop and frisk anyone who the store owner believed was 'casing' the place," says Coughlin. "These searches often turned up guns—which meant an immediate arrest under the old Sullivan Law."

What surprises Coughlin in retrospect is how often the guns were unloaded. "At least a third of the time, there were no bullets in the gun, or the firing pin was missing, or the gun had somehow been disabled. These guys wanted the fear the gun would bring, but they didn't want even the chance that someone might accidentally get killed during the stick-up. They knew a robbery meant jail, while a murder meant the electric chair."

THE MESSAGE OF A SWIFT AND SURE DEATH PENALTY IS: YOUR LIFE IS WORTH THE SAME AS EVERYONE ELSE'S. IT'S A NICE, DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE.

Unfortunately, liberals missed this point. When the Supreme Court overturned all state death penalties in *Furman* v. *Georgia* (1972), it was because this punishment was used unevenly from state to state. (Furman was scheduled to be executed for rape.) But liberals argued that the death penalty wasn't necessary anyway. In fact, it was nothing more than a "barbaric relic" of an earlier era. We were much more civilized now.

Time and history have proved this spectacularly wrong. One of the favorite statistics cited by death-penalty opponents in the 1960s was that 90 percent of all murders resulted from arguments between relatives and friends. "The death penalty won't prevent these murders," they argued. "They're committed without forethought."

True enough. Unfortunately, since that time, the murder rate has nearly tripled. Yet crimes of passion have declined to less than half the total. According to the latest FBI statistics, more than 50 percent of all killings are now "stranger murders," committed in the course of another crime. These murders *were* being deterred by an effective death penalty.

Punishment is a language. It is society's way of communicating with its members. The simple message of a swift and sure death penalty is: Your life is worth the same as everyone else's. It's a nice, democratic principle. Once upon a time, it was part of everyone's consciousness. People used phrases like "going to the chair" and "hanging for it" as checks against their potentially murderous impulses.

Today no one carries around this internal logic. Even in the states that do have capital punishment, the process is so slow and tortuous that people on death row may die of old age before they face their sentences. Most executions now are for crimes committed in the 1980s and 1970s. All this filters down. A few years ago, in an article entitled "Too Young To Die?" the *New York Times Magazine* lamented the fate of an unfortunate Texas inmate on death row for several felony murders he had committed as a teenager. His complaint? He had never heard of the death penalty.

The failure to draw that bright line between felonies and felony murder is particularly consequential for youthful amateurs—exactly the offenders the liberal press finds so sympathetic. In truth, Edward Summers probably never intended to kill anyone the day he went "shopping" for a jeep to replace one whose motor had burned out. He probably carried the gun to seem more convincing.

But once an armed robbery begins, a fatal logic sets in. "These people know me," the criminal says to himself. "They've seen my face. As soon as I let them go, they'll run and tell the police." Now it is the criminal himself who is getting scared. Often the victim is more rational. "I'll make you a promise that I won't tell anybody," Mrs. Weinstein told her kidnapper. But who can believe that?

And so the victim can only beg for mercy. "For my life!" she pleaded. "Don't you think I should be concerned and let you take my car? For my life?!"

But what if she had been able to say: "For your life! Do you really think taking this car is worth your life?" Would that have made a different impression?

William Tucker, a writer living in Brooklyn, contributed "A Little Girl Murdered" to the December 18 issue of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Temperamental Tycoon

By Tucker Carlson

On the seventh floor of a nondescript office building just north of Dallas, Russell Verney is considering what may be the most pressing question of the presidential campaign season so far: Is Ross Perot crazy? Verney, a former Democratic operative and air-traffic controller from New Hampshire, recently became the executive director of the Perot-funded Reform party—under whose banner the Texan hopes to go to the White House in November—so the question is more than merely academic. Verney treats it with all the gravity it merits. His voice rises, his eyes bulge, he stares straight ahead, never once blinking. He looks, for a moment, a lot like Ross Perot.

Then he explodes. "I think that's just an absolutely irresponsible question to ask," he snaps. "Absolutely irresponsible." Silence. He keeps staring intently, as if he's trying hard not to throw a punch. Verney is so convinced of his boss's sanity that even to ask about it is repugnant to him, practically sacrilege. "Instead of talking about the ideas Ross Perot has," Verney says, explaining why reporters ask questions like the one he just heard, "they call him crazy."

Certainly Perot himself has made a compelling case that he is unbalanced, at various times charging unnamed villains with everything from slander to trying to disrupt his daughter's wedding for political gain. During the third presidential debate in 1992—before millions of television viewers—Perot claimed that 20 years before, "the Vietnamese had sent people into Canada to make arrangements to have me and my family killed. The most significant effort they had one night is five people coming across my lawn with rifles." As Perot later explained, the Communist insurgents were expelled from suburban Dallas by his own crack security team using only a German Shepherd, which "worked them like a sheep dog," biting one of them as he ran off into the night. In retrospect, it is surprising Perot did not see the assassins with his own eyes since, as his former security consultant told the *New York Times*, Perot "would sometimes prowl the grounds himself, armed with an automatic rifle."

Both the local police department and the FBI subsequently dismissed the Vietnamese-killers story as ridiculous. "It did not happen," said the head of Dallas police intelligence. "If five members of the First Baptist Church with rifles had come onto his lawn, we would have found out about it."

According to a number of people who have worked with and for him, it doesn't end with assassins in the front yard. Ross Perot isn't just kooky, he's dictatorial and duplicitous. Nevertheless, if his Reform party gets off the ground in the 50 states (which is likely) and nominates him at its convention at the end of the summer (which is certain), Ross Perot could also be a significant factor in the 1996 presidential election.

To the world beyond his friends and employees in Dallas, the unpleasant side of Perot's personality first became starkly obvious during his 1992 bid for president. Contrary to the myth he helped construct, Perot seems to have been interested in political power, even in the idea of running for president, long before he announced his intentions on the now-famous *Larry King* show in 1992. More than two decades ago, a Nixon aide wrote in a memo that Perot's "major complaint" about the administration was that he was "never called by [the] president." By the 1980s, Perot was talking about the pressure he had come under to make a bid for the White House. In 1987, it was an admiring Bill Clinton, then the chairman of the National Governors' Association, who publicly urged Perot to run.

Forethought, however, is not the same as planning, and once in the race Perot soon discovered he could not control his diffuse and growing campaign, despite the fact it was being run largely by trusted acquaintances. (Some of the first organizers in the states were Perot's former bodyguards.) Perhaps as a result, spreading from the top of the campaign downward, Perot '92 became infected with a sometimes hysterical paranoia. One of the early victims of that paranoia was a middle-aged volunteer named Larry Way.

Way began working for Perot shortly after the *Larry King* appearance and in a short time became co-chairman of the campaign in his hometown of Frederick, Maryland. Way worked uneventfully as a volunteer for about six weeks until late April, when he was contacted by state headquarters in Annapolis and told

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he had been fired. The reason: Campaign officials had become convinced that Way was a high-ranking member of the Ku Klux Klan bent on committing acts of violence.

It is still unclear how this impression developed. Way, the owner of a home improvement business in his late 50s, hardly fits the profile of a dangerous political extremist. Plus, to observers of local politics, Way was not an unknown or sinister figure, having been the mayor of Burkittsville, Maryland, for eight years in the 1970s and a candidate for county commissioner in 1990. Yet days later, when he tried to retrieve belongings from his campaign office, Way was confronted by security guards hired by Perot headquarters in Texas and told he would be arrested if he returned.

Larry Way never went back to the campaign, but the campaign did not forget about him. In Dallas, the head of the Perot Petition Committee, Mark Blahnik, retained the Callahan & Gibbons Group, Inc., a private detective agency in San Francisco that also provided security for the Perot campaign (and which seems to have gone out of existence when Perot lost), to investigate Way. Blahnik's instructions to the head of the agency, it was later revealed in a deposition, were to "do whatever he felt was appropriate" to uncover information about the former volunteer. Callahan & Gibbons did just that, hiring in turn two other private detective agencies, one in New York, one in Maryland. Before it was over, the investigation of Larry Way cost the Perot campaign a total of $18,000, more than $16,000 of it in billing hours. In a subsequent attempt at cover-up, the expenses were described in FEC filings as "legal fees."

For its money, the Dallas headquarters got a fairly detailed accounting of Way's life. In addition to tracking down his previous address and Social Security number, the investigators checked paternity records, his file at the Department of Motor Vehicles, and federal, state, and local law enforcement lists for evidence of a criminal history. (He had none.) An assignment sheet from Montgomery Investigative Services, the private detective agency in Maryland, has "RUSH!" written at the top of the page and describes the search into Way's background as pertaining to a "criminal" case. Yet, as it turned out, there was nothing criminal about Larry Way. No evidence ever surfaced tying him to white supremacist groups.

Still, the Perot campaign remained unconvinced. Joan Vinson, the Perot official who fired Way (and who is now head of the Reform party in Maryland) continued to tell people, among them a local radio talk-show host, that Way was a bigot. And Way continued to be investigated. Acting on a tip from another Perot volunteer, Way called three different credit-reporting companies, including Equifax, to see if his credit history had been requested recently. In all three cases, it had (probably illegally, as it turns out).

Larry Way later sued Perot campaign officials, and Perot himself, on the grounds his privacy had been invaded. He lost when a judge decided it hadn't. Other plaintiffs, however, may be luckier. Officials in Dallas have admitted hiring at least four different private detective agencies to investigate volunteers, and a number of those volunteers have filed suit. In one instance from the 1992 campaign, all 11 of Perot's electors in the state of Missouri found their computer files had been searched by investigators retained by Dallas headquarters. Asked if the new Reform party will continue in the Perot tradition of management by private detective, Russell Verney replies cryptically, "I'm not going to prejudge that. Every circumstance brings out its course of action."

Nor is Larry Way the only Perot worker to find himself the subject of strange allegations. Other volunteers say it is not uncommon for those who tangle with Dallas headquarters or its representatives in the states to be accused of embezzlement or sexual harassment. Still others have reported being pressured to sign "confessions" of their misdeeds. One former official in United We Stand America, the non-profit group Perot started after the 1992 campaign, was summoned before a gathering of his colleagues and humiliated after he made the mistake of arguing with a loyal Perot employee. His ostensible offense, denied by the alleged victim: groping a female member of Congress *while appearing with her on a television show.*

Stories like this help account for the paranoia one often encounters among people associated with Perot. Many volunteers for the Reform party are leery of being asked even the most simple questions; some won't talk to the press at all without permission from Dallas headquarters. But there is another reason for the skittishness: One of the major tenets of the Perot faith holds that the media intentionally distort coverage of "Ross." For Perot's followers, it is a natural conclusion. Perot, they believe, is a threat to the cabal they call "The Establishment," of which the mainstream press is a central conspirator. As one Reform party organizer in Omaha put it, explaining her unwillingness to speak to a reporter, "big corporations own almost all of the big media anymore and they have a slant that they want."

This conspiratorial understanding of the press extends even—perhaps especially—to the Dallas head-

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quarters of the Perot organization. For instance, when comments that Perot made during a question-and-answer period after a speech at the National Press Club last year mysteriously failed to appear on C-SPAN, Perot employees knew exactly what had happened. "I don't think it is an accident," campaign head Verney told volunteers at a meeting in April 1995. "Political operatives manipulate the information that you are exposed to." And, Verney explained, that applies to C-SPAN, which is "not immune to political leaders calling them up and saying, 'If you want access, make sure that this doesn't happen.'" In the world of Ross Perot, even Brian Lamb can end up looking like a political operative.

No one is more suspicious of the media than Perot himself, and since entering politics he has been particularly reluctant to grant interviews to print reporters. Instead, Perot prefers to appear on television—a medium he is better able to dominate and control—where the questions are apt to be softballs or at least easily ignored. As a matter of public relations it's not a bad strategy. When Perot strays from it, the results can be embarrassing. Reporter Dan Balz of the *Washington Post* tried for longer than a year to secure an interview with the selectively reclusive billionaire. Perot finally acquiesced last month, then proceeded to tell Balz a bizarre story—"You're not going to believe this," Perot cautioned—about how one of the two major political parties had "called up" in 1993 and asked him to donate $1 million for a "dirty tricks" campaign against the other. Needless to say, the heads of both parties vehemently denied having done any such thing, and Perot was forced to "clarify" his previous statement.

Michael Ramirez

Perot doesn't make the mistake of meeting with news outlets like the *Washington Post* often. Fortunately, you don't need to talk to Ross Perot to catch a glimpse of his personality—it saturates everything he touches, particularly his two political organizations, United We Stand America and the Reform party.

A visit to the Reform party headquarters in Maryland one recent weekday shortly before noon found the spacious offices, located above an Italian restaurant in Annapolis, almost deserted. The sole occupant happened also to be the party's one full-time employee in Maryland, state coordinator Joan Vinson. And yet the empty office space still seemed full—of Ross Perot. As in his Dallas headquarters, Perot's face appears everywhere, accessible from every vantage, peering forth from photos on the walls, grinning from the covers of books, handouts, and videotapes stacked on the shelves. A diminutive (but still life-size) cardboard cutout of the candidate stands in the corner, seemingly keeping watch. Strangest of all, the only other live human being in the offices, Joan Vinson, herself comes off as a kind of female Perot impersonator, punctuating her sentences with a nasal "Right? Right?" and holding forth on the evils of "the pundits" in Washington. Close your eyes as she speaks and you can almost hear Larry King in the background taking a call from Sioux City.

But it is more than Perot's physical likeness that pervades his organizations. His control does, too. For a public persona rich in contradiction, this may be the greatest irony: that a man ostensibly committed to radical populism is also something of a dictator.

"I'm Ross, you're the boss," Perot is fond of saying, and it is clear that to his followers, this is the candidate's strongest selling point. The Reform party's platform, known as the "Principles of Reform," calls among other things for the elimination of the Electoral College, which Perot considers a useless structure designed to keep citizens—"You, the owners of America"—from exercising real control. At the Reform party's convention, which will be held at an undetermined location around Labor Day, party members will be able to put that principle into action by voting directly for their choice of presidential nominee (not that there is much question who will win), as well as for House and Senate candidates who will then receive the party's endorsement. There will be no delegates at this convention. Reform party members who can't make it to the event can cast their ballots electronically, though the Internet.

Democracy made pure by computers makes for

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great populist rhetoric. Yet it is not clear that Perot has ever been very attentive to the desires of his beloved People. In September 1992, the candidate, fears about his daughter's wedding apparently assuaged, asked his followers to help him decide whether to rejoin the presidential race. To make the process easier, Perot advertised an 800 number that citizens could call to weigh in on the subject. Except, it turned out, there was no weighing in allowed. Those who dialed the number were simply thanked for calling, their calls taken as proof of their support for Perot.

Orson Swindle, a former prisoner of war in Vietnam who acted as Perot's adviser and principal spokesman in the 1992 campaign, also found out the hard way what little interest his former boss has in dissenting opinions. Swindle, who now lives in Hawaii where he is running for Congress as a Republican, was invited to Dallas last August to speak at a convention held by United We Stand. Slated to sit on a panel that would discuss the idea of a third political party, Swindle was promptly bumped from the speakers list when it became clear that his views on the subject differed from Perot's. His seat on the panel remained empty. "I had been asked to be there," Swindle says, "but when I got there I was told, 'Well, maybe not.'"

Evidence of his anti-democratic impulses notwithstanding, Perot was able shortly after the 1992 election to rally more than a million people to his United We Sand America organization, mostly on the promise that by joining him, they would increase their power in the political process. As the vast majority of them later found—the group's membership has dropped to 100,000 or fewer—it didn't turn out that way. When the will of the people contradicted his own, Perot simply bulldozed the people.

In October 1994, an official in the Florida chapter of United We Stand named Sally Bell polled members of the organization and asked which candidate they planned to vote for in the upcoming governor's election. The results were definitive: By a large margin, Florida's Perot voters preferred Republican Jeb Bush to incumbent Lawton Chiles. There was only one problem: Perot himself disagreed. A long-time enemy of the Bush family, Perot adamantly favored Chiles and at one point considered traveling to Florida to throw his weight behind the governor. (Around the same time, Perot also came out in favor of Texas governor Ann Richards in her race against Jeb Bush's brother George W.) A bitter, if mostly silent, battle ensued between Perot headquarters in Dallas and the rank and file they purported to represent in Florida. It didn't take long for Perot's side—those insistent critics of "dirty politics"—to get out the big guns.

Ten days before the election, members of the state's United We Stand office mailed the latest edition of the group's newsletter, which contained the results of Sally Bell's poll. Before postal workers could send them out, however, a Perot loyalist showed up at the Daytona Beach post office and demanded the newsletters. Intimidated employees in the bulk-mail department turned over all 8,000 copies, still in federal mail bags. Bob McNatt, the editor of the newsletter, managed to track down the stolen publications days later and remail them, though it is not clear whether they reached United We Stand members before the election.

Pat Muth, the Perot employee (and now Reform party coordinator for the state of Florida) who encouraged the confiscation of the newsletters, refuses to answer questions about the episode—and at one point refused even to acknowledge her own identity, pretending when reached by phone to be "just a volunteer who came to pick up a package." Many members of United We Stand, fed up with Perot's efforts to control "their" organization, didn't wait around for confirmation of the episode. The Florida chapter all but disbanded shortly after the 1994 elections. "Perot turned out to be worse than the people he was fighting," says Sally Bell.

Duane Schooley shares the sentiment. For 16 months, beginning in May 1994, Schooley, a 62-year-old delivery-business owner in Seattle, was the chairman of United We Stand in Washington state. By the winter of 1995, Schooley and some of his colleagues were curious about what was becoming of all the money their organization had raised. At $15 per membership—plus the brisk business United We Stand was doing in Perot-related paraphernalia such as posters, books, videos, pamphlets, and phone cards—there were many dollars to be accounted for. During a videotaped meeting at the Marriott Hotel in Seattle with Russell Verney, Schooley raised the question. "Basically, Verney told us it was none of our business—to go take a flying leap," Schooley says. "We have never gotten an accounting of where the money went from an organization that was supposed to be ours."

Anne Saucier, secretary of the United We Stand America chapter in Ohio, believes some of that money went to build the Reform party. Like many volunteers, Saucier is upset that United We Stand, a nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization, has been effectively transformed into a vehicle for Perot's presidential ambitions. When Saucier saw that, in violation of federal election law, assets from United We Stand—"the databases, the personnel, all the equipment, the fax

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machines, telephones, Xerox machines"—were being used to build the Reform party (a charge confirmed by volunteers in other United We Stand offices), she and other volunteers filed a complaint. The FEC is now investigating.

In Dallas, Verney responds by claiming that Saucier, a 74-year-old retired social worker, is waging a campaign of "harassment." "I don't know who they're operating on behalf of," he says conspiratorially.

But it is Saucier who appears to feel harassed. Perot's lawyers are now attempting to have her and her colleagues deposed, a process sure to be intimidating to retired volunteers. "People are very fearful of their phones' being tapped," Saucier says. "Perot could teach dirty tricks to the Republicans and the Democrats."

For all of Perot's obvious flaws, many of his former followers are crestfallen when they find that he is unable to fulfill their desires or assuage their inadequacies. "When Perot says, 'It's not about me,' trust me, it's about him," says Marilou Stanley, former state director of United We Stand in Arizona.

WHEN THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE CONTRADICTS HIS OWN, PEROT SIMPLY BULLDOZES THE PEOPLE.

Russ Lucas, a 40-year-old Dallas machinist who once volunteered to man United We Stand's computer system, is one of the sadder one-time Perotistas. Lucas says he stopped going to Perot headquarters when it dawned on him that the new Reform party was not an exercise in rejuvenating democracy, but just "a platform for Perot to step up to the White House."

Like others in his position, Lucas sounds a little like a veteran of cult deprogramming, as he describes the time he spent involved with Perot. When he first joined United We Stand in March 1992, Lucas says, "I was fresh out of a divorce. I was looking for something to do." Before long, he was spending 20 hours a week at Perot headquarters. Yet despite all he was giving to the organization, Lucas insists, "I didn't want anything back. I didn't want any money. I felt bad about eating snacks there, to tell you the truth. They had me bad." When he left, "I felt like there was a death in the family. I was really depressed. And there're a lot of people like me." Lucas stops speaking. The telephone connection has gone bad for a moment, and a buzzing sound comes over the line. "I hope that's not Ross," he says.

Of course, by comparison, Russ Lucas is in pretty good shape. Some of his former co-workers still haven't caught on, and theirs may be most depressing plight of all. These are Perot's true believers, for whom nothing Perot does or says, no matter how strange, seems amiss—or, if necessary, goes undefended.

These are people like Tom Overocker, a 48-year-old professional Reform party organizer from Virginia who quit his job as a real estate appraiser in 1992 after seeing Perot on *Larry King*. "Working for him has given me the freedom to do things that I never dreamed I could do," says Overocker mistily. "I have a lot of faith in him."

Or like Sharon Holman, Perot's longtime spokeswoman, who seems almost bewildered when told that some people consider her boss's story about Vietnamese soldiers on his front lawn a sign of mental illness "Why do they think that's delusional?" she asks without a hint of sarcasm.

Of course, Perot's political ventures have always drawn more than their share of the credulous. Orson Swindle remembers the 1992 campaign as being heavily populated by oddballs. The Republicans and Democrats, Swindle says he told Perot at the time, "have a party structure that does a pretty good job of keeping [such people] on the fringes. Our train came through town and they all jumped on it."

One who never got off the train is the conductor himself, Ross Perot. Instead, Perot keeps chugging along, running his latest campaign, shaking up the dreaded establishment. And, as always, confusing those who listen closely to what he says. In late March, Perot made yet another addition to his growing list of statements to ponder when he told Larry King, "The last time I was on your show, we got 800,000 calls."

It was quite a claim, considering that during the appearance on *Larry King* Perot was referring to—November 8, 1995—the program had only 800,000 *viewers*. On the other hand, details like how many calls Perot actually got don't appear to bother followers like James Wilson, a retired volunteer who mans the phone bank at Reform party headquarters.

Wilson isn't sure how many calls came in after *Larry King*. But he is sure he likes Ross Perot. Since August 1993, he has spent at least three days a week volunteering for the Cause. Though it is tempting to ask Wilson why one of the richest men in the world would rely on the free labor of lower-income people like him to achieve a vain personal ambition, it doesn't seem like a very nice question under the circumstances. Wilson seems content enough. "We're going to be the majority party," he says hopefully. "If I didn't think that, I wouldn't be here." ♦

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Sacrilege in Our Time: The Imus Affair Explained

By Andrew Ferguson

Now more than a week old, the Don Imus affair shows no sign of weakening its hold over Washington's moralists. This means that as an inside-the-Beltway obsession it has outlasted the North Korean nuclear crisis, the Steve Forbes surge, and the debt ceiling extension combined. Only a true outrage can hold Washington's attention for such an eternity—a deliberate breach of some near-sacred precept.

And indeed this is what Imus, for 25 years a famous New York radio entertainer, has committed. When he took the stage at the Radio and TV Correspondents Dinner on March 21, and made "inappropriate jokes" before the president and First Lady, and forced his hosts to issue a general apology, and led White House press secretary Mike McCurry to ask C-SPAN not to rebroadcast his remarks, and caused soul-searching and brow-knitting among the worrywart community, Imus violated carefully tended standards and upended precious Washington rituals. For which he deserves a good deal of credit.

Like so many Washington controversies, the Imus affair was almost inevitable and yet utterly unexpected. Spring carries with it to Washington a round of press dinners—the Gridiron Dinner, the White House Correspondents Dinner, the National Press Club Foundation Dinner, the White House Photographers Dinner, the Radio and TV Correspondents Dinner, and still more. These events follow a ritual as stylized as a Kabuki or a High Mass, with fewer laughs.

The ritual unfolds like so. Members of the Washington press corps, or some elite segment of it, gather in the ballroom of a downtown hotel to shower one another with praise: Awards are bestowed for obscure accomplishments, tributes recited, fallen comrades recalled. In this the press corps is like any other professional organization—say, the Council Bluffs chapter of the American Association of Pre-owned Carpet Salespersons. The difference is that the salesmen have the modesty and circumspection to keep the event within the fraternity; they do not, for example, force invitations upon the people to whom they have sold used carpet, under the presumption that anyone would enjoy watching Paulie Luzzano accept his award for High Volume Man of the Year.

The Washington press corps, of course, knows no such modesty. For their annual fêtes, the newsfolk invite the people they wrangle with and write about every day. They invite politicians. And expect them to come. The politicians oblige, almost without fail. And here is the essence of the ritual. Like a mass, a press dinner is a reenactment, and as with a mass its purpose is to reaffirm fundamental beliefs about the way the world works. A religious ritual conjures from chaos the proof that God's in His heaven and all's right with the world. A Washington press dinner shows who's boss.

There shouldn't be any question about how the Washington hierarchy is stacked. The president can strike down legislation, order men into battle, and annihilate whole cities with the push of a button. Yet it is with trembling fingers and gnawing gut that he reaches each morning for the handiwork of the Washington press corps. No, politicians understand as well as anyone who carries the real power in Washington, and the press dinner merely reifies the arrangement, acts it out and drives it home.

So invariably at press dinners the president is invited, and usually comes, and is made to grovel before his many-headed master. The preferred euphemism for "groveling" is "self-deprecation." By tradition, the president (or some surrogate—a vice president, a majority or minority leader) must show "he can laugh at himself." That is, the president must take the caricature of himself created by the press and use it as a template for his jokes: Thus President Reagan joked at press dinners about his absent-mindedness, his naps, his trigger-happy foreign policy; President Bush joked about being out of touch and to the manor born; Mrs. Reagan, in a performance that still brings hums of delight from pressfolk, humiliated herself by taking the stage at the Gridiron dressed in rags and warbling a parody of her high-flown tastes. A press don once said to me, "The Gipper may have been an idiot, but at least he and Nancy could laugh at themselves."

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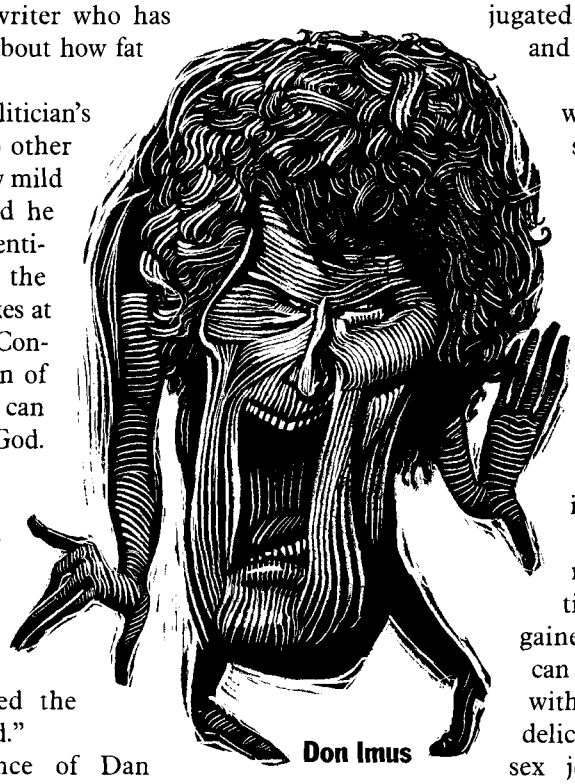
Self-deprecatory jokes can be very funny, but self-deprecation, when scripted by someone other than oneself, is simply eerie. When the president takes the podium, it is understood that he has had to haul in special talent to write the jokes—most administrations, in fact, keep a handful of professional joke writers on retainer for just this purpose—and this barely concealed fillip deepens the pleasure the audience derives from his humiliation. It is one thing for President Clinton to tell a joke about his large appetite; quite another when you realize the joke was concocted by a moonlighting Leno writer who has been paid to sit and think about how fat the president is.

To be satisfactory, the politician's homily should contain two other elements. He must take a few mild jabs at his adversaries; and he must, in closing, lapse into sentimentality. As for the jabs, the essential word is "mild." Jokes at the expense of the press or Congress encourage the illusion of reciprocity: This president can give as good as he gets, by God. Of course, he cannot. If he did, the *Washington Post* Style section—which certifies these ceremonies the following morning—would point out that many of the politician's jokes were "barbed," or "crossed the line," or were "mean-spirited."



Don Imus

Consider the experience of Dan Quayle. Shortly after taking office, he stood in for President Bush at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. John Tower's nomination as defense secretary had just been rejected by the Senate—and, of course, by the press—owing to his alleged boozing and womanizing. Quayle's first joke was: "Watching your conduct throughout the evening, I realized that most of you do not aspire to be secretary of defense."

"This was greeted by loud boos," the *Post* reported. Quayle's jokes, the paper stressed, were "barbed." They elicited groans from the press. "It gets better," Quayle told the crowd. The *Post* disagreed: "It didn't get much better."

Days later, Quayle appeared at the Gridiron. His opening joke, to everyone's relief, showed he had learned his lesson. Quayle said he had recently asked President Bush to make some public gesture that would demonstrate Bush's faith in his new vice president. The president, according to Quayle, put his arm around him and asked: "Do you want a puppy?" The joke was a big hit. Quayle was a big hit.

After the self-deprecation and the mild jabs, the politician caps his remarks with what sitcom writers call the "moment of shit," the syrupy summing up in which all that has gone before is cheerfully resolved. *A free press has served us pretty darn well for 200 years. . . . Sure we have our differences, but we have the same goal in view, we share the same love of . . .* and so on. The First Amendment survives, the politician has subjugated himself, God's in His heaven, and all's right with the world.

But the press is not yet through with its politician guest. The final segment of the ritual is "the entertainment," a monologue from a semi-famous, second-tier stand-up comic, preferably one who is recognizable from TV: Paula Poundstone, Bill Maher, Al Franken, Conan O'Brien, Dennis Miller, and suchlike. The comic too is expected to humiliate the politician-guest, as well as throw in a safe gag or two about the press (Sam Donaldson's loud mouth, Irving R. Levine's bow ties). But because he will have gained his fame on network TV he can be expected to joke comfortably within the boundaries of taste set by delicate Washington sensibilities: no sex jokes, no jokes about bodily processes, and so on. For the most part the comics have complied.

And then somebody invited Imus.

As a 1990s disc jockey, Imus specializes in jokes about sex and other bodily processes. But he is also famous for his political satire, much of it remarkably sophisticated, the rest less so, but almost all of it funny. This has led dozens of journalists to appear regularly on his show—Cokie Roberts, Nina Totenberg, Dan Rather, and many more—notwithstanding that the political satire often overlaps with the sex and flatulence jokes. Here is Imus at the outer edge, from a song parody:

She won't do housework, 'cause it makes her sick.
Doesn't bake cookies like the rest of those chicks.
The ace in her hole is a Willie that's slick
That's why the First Lady is a tramp.

Kevin Chadwick

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It should have come as no surprise, then, that Imus's monologue at the Radio and TV Correspondents Dinner was similarly tasteless. The surprise was how tasteless he wasn't. By acclamation, the most offensive of his jokes concerned the president's infidelity: "When Cal Ripken broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive-games record, the president was at Camden Yards . . . and we all heard the president holler, 'Go, Baby.' And I remember commenting at the time, 'I bet that's not the first time he's said that.' Remember the Astroturf in the pickup?"

Many observers have blamed the dinner's organizers for inviting Imus, but in fact they were moving in uncharted territory. The rules of the ritual are getting confused. Imus makes remarkably crude jokes about the president and First Lady on his radio show; then James Carville, George Stephanopoulos, Bob Bennett, Dee Dee Myers, and the president himself appear on it. Show-biz humor, including political jokes, has coincidentally been debased just as the office of the presidency follows a similar trajectory. Nowadays a man who wants to be president might confess his infidelity on *60 Minutes*. A man who *is* president might make jokes about his sex life and the seductive properties of Astroturf in a public speech. He even might joke about his underwear before a televised audience of teenagers. It becomes harder and harder, therefore, for a press dinner to fulfill its assigned purpose of humiliation. The confluence of these trends led inevitably to Imus's performance at the podium of the correspondents' dinner.

Where Imus most seriously departed from the ritual, however, was in training his fire on the press itself. As noted, custom demands a few press jokes, the lamer the better. Imus told jokes that were funny and mean, and true: unforgivable. He recommended that Peter Jennings, a notorious ladies' man, have a V-chip in his shorts. He joked about the old charges of plagiarism that hover around Nina Totenberg, and Dan Rather's obviously tenuous mental health, and ABC News's devotion to the Clinton White House, and Ed Bradley's ludicrous earring ("Ed, you're a newsman, not a pirate"). At the High Mass of a press dinner, this isn't the stuff you're supposed to find in the missal. "If there was any real courage in that Washington press corps," said Scripps Howard's Martin Schramm, reflecting widespread indignation, "they would have walked out on Don Imus en masse." And damn the terrific vanilla bombe dessert.

Will the Imus affair do long-lasting damage to the press's favorite ritual? The irony is that the president himself won't let it. McCurry says the president looks forward to attending the dinner next year, assuming he's reelected. And indeed he is probably wise to make the promise.

It has taken many years for the press dinner to evolve to this point. Incredibly, years ago, dinner organizers would choose the entertainment *because the president might like it*. President Eisenhower usually declined to attend the dinners; only the promise of a performance by the Lennon Sisters, fresh from the Lawrence Welk show, lured him out in his final year in office. Barbra Streisand, a Kennedy favorite, was invited to sing for JFK, and the torch singer Julie London was used as LBJ bait.

The nature of the entertainment changed as the press grew more adversarial, until the evening blossomed into the full-blown unpleasantness that the press enjoys today. Presidents balk, but they pay a price. Jimmy Carter may have fainted while jogging and joked about diarrhea during state visits, but he had enough understanding of the presidency's inherent dignity to hate press dinners. He skipped more than he attended—further evidence, reporters said, that "he didn't like the press." (To which the only answer is: "What's to like?") And a former staffer recalls coaching President Bush before his performance at a press dinner. "I don't want to do this," Bush finally said. "I will not do this."

"You have to do it," the staffer replied.

"But I'm president of the United States!" Bush said. "I don't have to do it if I don't want to."

"Mr. President," the staffer said, "you have to do it *because* you're president of the United States."

It is the final irony—which any president will ignore at great peril. After one particularly humiliating press dinner in 1971, Richard Nixon composed a remarkable memo to H.R. Haldeman. "Let me give you a hard-nosed appraisal of the White House Correspondents' Dinner," he began.

> The reporters receiving the awards were way-out left wingers. . . . I had to sit there for 20 minutes while the drunken audience laughed in derision as the award citations were read. I'm not a bit thin-skinned [sic!], but I do have the responsibility to protect the office of the Presidency from such insulting incidents. I'm sure that [White House staffers] approved this charade because it would demonstrate that the President was a "good sport." I don't have to demonstrate that. . . . Under absolutely no circumstances will I attend any more dinners of this type in the future.

With a single exception two years later, Nixon kept to his vow. And look what happened to him. ♦

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The Rise and Fall of the Homeless

By Andrew Peyton Thomas

Whatever happened to the homeless? Not so long ago they haunted Americans at almost every turn. In our largest cities, aggressive panhandlers blocked the sidewalks by day and street people dozed on the bus-stop benches and steam grates by night. On our living room TV sets, their grievances were pressed relentlessly in news shows, docudramas, and movies of the week. An influential coalition of activists emerged to secure their rights. The public was understandably alarmed on being told that America had generated—rather suddenly—a large beggar underclass of citizens who lacked the means even to put a roof over their heads.

As the media flashed images of tattered, destitute people curling up in cardboard boxes on cold nights, elected officials across the political spectrum united in seeking greater government spending to address the startling phenomenon. An entire political movement petitioned for redress of the concerns of these lowest of the low. They scored impressive victories in Congress and major municipalities. By the time Ronald Reagan left office, the homeless were commonly pointed to as compelling evidence of a hardhearted "Decade of Greed" over which he had allegedly presided. President Bush, seeking a "kinder, gentler nation," joined Congress in funding the federal homeless-relief programs that today receive more than $1 billion annually.

But the TV cameras and journalists—even the political activists whose enterprise is the marketing of group entitlements—have largely moved on to other interests of late. The street people remain, to be sure, in numbers that are probably at least as high as when the homeless-rights movement began more than a decade ago. Yet theirs is a cause that shows every sign of being in its terminal stages, without the public attention and sympathy gained so readily in the eighties.

Many of the cities once known for their publicly funded hospitality toward the homeless have grown weary of the expense and disorder that accompanied the rise in the homeless population. After Washington, D.C., residents passed a right-to-shelter law in 1984 by a more than two-to-one margin, the number of homeless seeking free housing surged dramatically. At first, the city sought to deal with the heightened demand by increasing its annual budget for homeless services, from $9 million to $40 million between 1985 and 1990. In 1990, the District Council finally acknowledged budgetary realities and voted to repeal the right-to-shelter law. Voters upheld the repeal in a ballot initiative.

At least 42 cities have adopted new measures to discourage vagrancy or to move the homeless into less desirable locations. Police in New York have prodded the homeless out of the pricier districts of Manhattan; it is a rare street person these days who can slumber without disturbance in boutique doorways along Madison Avenue or on Grand Central's marble floors. After a homeless person was suspected of raping two women on Boston Common last year, Mayor Tom Menino prohibited "loitering" and sleeping on the Common and in the adjacent Public Garden at night. Capping a series of city ordinances cracking down on aggressive panhandling and drinking and urinating in public, Seattle officials in January barred the homeless encampments that had previously left a trail of feces, urine, and abandoned needles outside City Hall. Atlanta, meanwhile, has moved the homeless out of high-visibility areas in anticipation of the Summer Olympics.

San Francisco's anti-vagrancy efforts have received the most national attention, probably because, with its reputation as a haven for anything-goes individualism, the city would seem the last redoubt of homeless activism. Sensing that even his metropolis had its limits, former mayor Frank Jordan took measures in the early nineties to discourage vagrancy in some of the city's most famous and profitable quarters.

These efforts became known as the Matrix programs. Matrix I involved police sweeps of targeted neighborhoods, including Civic Center, St. Mary's Park, and Union Square. Matrix II focused on remov-

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ing campers from their illegal lodgings in Golden Gate Park. While polls indicated that a plurality of San Franciscans supported Jordan's policies, his recent defeat by Willie Brown may well bring these reforms to an end. Mayor Brown has ambiguously instructed Police Chief Fred Lau "to enforce the law, but not to the extent that the homeless or the poor are singled out."

If San Francisco is still ambivalent about breaking with homeless orthodoxy, in the rest of the country the homeless-rights movement is collapsing under mounting public resistance. The reasons for the collapse are open to some interpretation. Those on the left still committed to the aims of the movement will argue that its downfall is due to America's callousness toward the poor. The Right might well respond that the election of Bill Clinton made the issue go away, since it was anti-Republican animus that brought the issue to life in the early 1980s.

But no amount of interpretation can obscure the fact that the homeless-rights movement has failed. And the story of its rise and fall reveals some unpleasant things about the nation's leadership—judges, politicians, lawyers, professional activists, and the press. Yet the cynicism and self-service that were too often displayed in the forging of this movement are matched by something both heartening and illuminating: the common sense of the American people even in the face of a well-orchestrated campaign of illusion.

HARSH LABELS SUCH AS "HOBOS," "TRAMPS," AND "BUMS" ONCE SERVED AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL PURPOSE.

An autopsy of the homeless-rights movement must begin with an appraisal of the vital legal groundwork laid by the Supreme Court a decade before the activists took the stage. In the 1972 case *Papachristou* v. *City of Jacksonville*, the court overturned vagrancy laws across the nation that reflected an Anglo-American legal tradition extending back to the 14th century in England and to ancient Athens before then. Vagrancy laws sought to uphold public order and personal responsibility by encouraging gainful employment and stable ties to family and neighbors.

In an opinion written by Justice William O. Douglas, the court ruled vagrancy laws void for vagueness and unconstitutional. Douglas devoted much of his opinion to discussing the value of recreational walking, which he curiously equated with vagrancy. He noted that "wandering or strolling" had been "extolled by Walt Whitman and Vachel Lindsay," for example.

Thus did poetry and law combine to stimulate a seismic change in attitude toward a class of people whom Western societies had previously viewed as a threat to social stability. The type of people who have come to be known as the homeless are of course scarcely unique to the United States. All societies to some degree have fretted over and penalized a certain number of citizens who rebel against family and career commitments and prefer to live an independent, nomadic existence, even at the subsistence level. Americans once referred to such people as "hobos" and "tramps," or more harshly as "derelicts" and "bums."

While these labels may well strike us today as mean-spirited, they once served an important social purpose. They discouraged through public scorn the extreme individualistic license that marked such people. The idyllic portrait of vagrancy painted by the *Papachristou* opinion contrasted starkly with the dangers Americans had till then seen in permitting people to reject family and civic attachments, to roam and beg from orderly, responsible citizens. The Supreme Court, however, came to view such vagrants as a persecuted class that deserved protection, not a legal stimulus to change its behavior.

The decriminalization of vagrancy, by itself, might not have produced the nomadic population redefined, in the early 1980s, as "the homeless." But this overthrow of age-old legal practice was accompanied by a separate and equally fateful legal revolution—the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill. Following successful lobbying and litigation by civil libertarians, mentally ill patients were released onto America's streets in large numbers from state hospitals and other mental-health institutions. In the eighties, civil liberties groups sought and won judicial recognition of the "right" of the mentally ill to live as vagrants, free from any public supervision or restraint.

The most famous, saddening symbol of this legal battle was Billie Boggs, a mad New York street person celebrated at Harvard Law School for her legal victories. Boggs subsequently returned to a street life of squalor and defecating on public sidewalks. Other such symbols would follow. There was Larry Hogue, a "homeless" crack addict on Manhattan's Upper West Side who became known as the "Wild Man of 96th Street" for the violent crimes he committed on the many occasions he was released from psychiatric hospitals. In Washington, the 1993 death of 43-year-old

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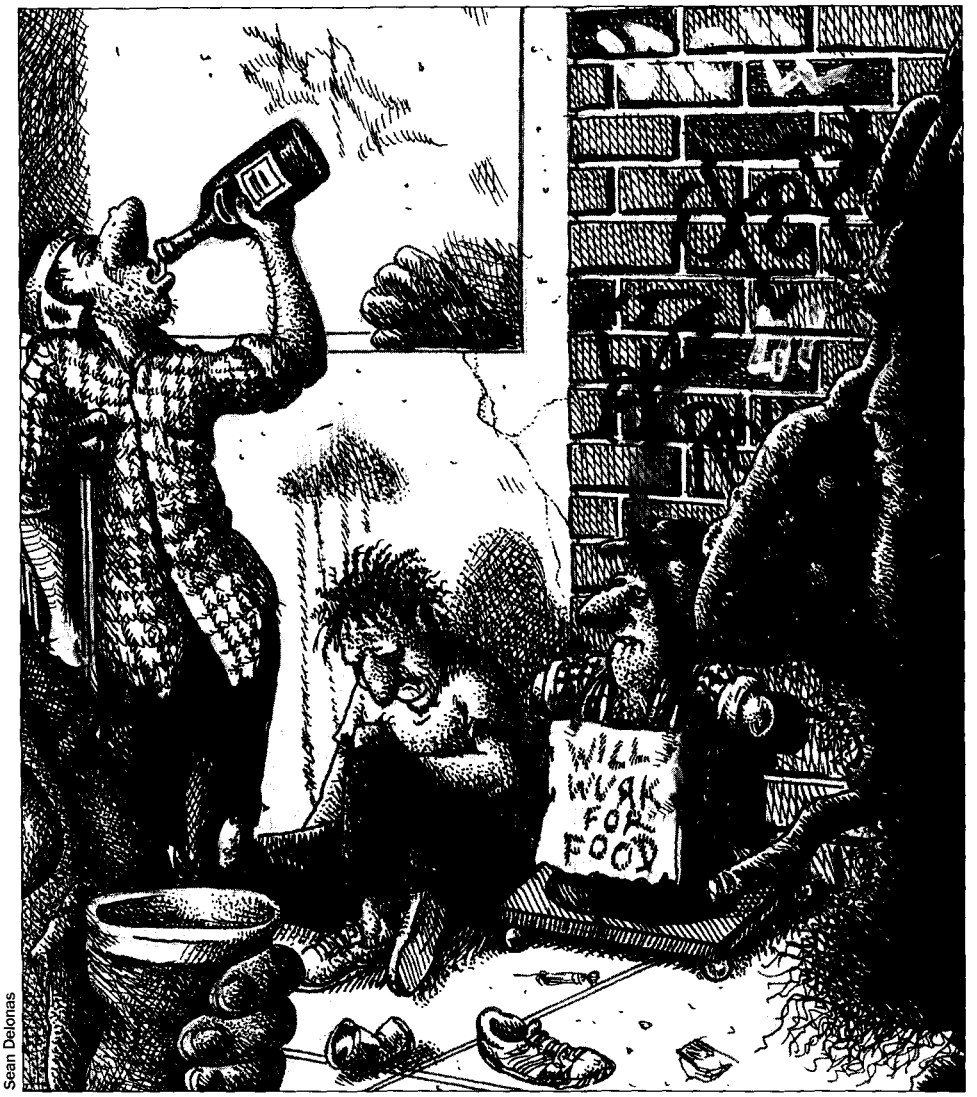

Sean Delonas

Yetta M. Adams across the street from the offices of the Department of Housing and Urban Development prompted a sermon from HUD secretary Henry Cisneros on the need for more federal aid to the homeless. Adams, suffering from schizophrenia, died of complications from diabetes; she had repeatedly spurned help from a variety of social service agencies.

The fact that such people are still reflexively labeled "homeless," a term that doesn't even begin to describe their varying pathologies, is the result of a deception at the heart and origin of the homeless-rights movement. As the old psychiatric facilities began emptying in the seventies and eighties, civil libertarians and allied lawyers and activists willfully suppressed meaningful distinctions between street denizens—some of whom were mentally ill, many of whom were alcoholics and drug addicts, and only a small number of whom were merely lacking the means to put a roof over their heads. All were renamed "the homeless," their lowest common denominator, and then put on display en masse as heart-rending proof that "Reaganomics" was brutalizing the poor.

The novelty of the new movement's defining term—there is virtually no record of "homeless" as a synonym for vagrant prior to the 1980s—can best be understood by considering the descriptions it replaced. In his 1980 book *The Manners and Customs of the Police*, prominent sociologist Donald Black spoke, for example, of the residents of "skid row." "Sociologically," he noted, "skid row is not so much a matter of geography as of lifestyle, involving nomadism, unemployment, heavy consumption of alcoholic beverages, foraging, begging, and a principled rejection of conventional modes of existence."

This analysis is typical of both popular and academic attitudes toward this class of people up to that time. It was recognized that America, like all societies before it and consistent with human nature, would always have a certain number of people unwilling to submit to the habits and responsibilities of the majority. Yet those who refuse to accommodate themselves to society's minimum demands—overwhelmingly men who wish to live as loners, fleeing all personal accountability—assert, in effect, that meaningful contributions to our loved ones and to society are optional rather than a basic duty of citizenship.

The homeless-rights movement could not succeed, then, without radically transforming these enduring beliefs—to the point where drifters would become an

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object of pity instead of ire, and to the even further point where civilized society would be condemned for shirking its obligations to these drifters, rather than the reverse.

The leaders of this movement and their allies in government and the press accomplished this transformation through various misrepresentations and a new conception of individual rights. First, they promoted the view that the homeless were people "just like us," folks who had lost their jobs or were otherwise down on their luck economically. Their plight was said to be a social injustice stemming from unkind federal budget cuts and, more broadly, the energized capitalism of the eighties. Second, legal activists for the homeless picked up where Justice Douglas left off. They argued that the homeless were, in essence, people who simply enjoyed strolling too much—people who had a legal right to live as vagabonds without government interference. Many judges ratified this new, extreme vision of personal liberty, even for the deinstitutionalized insane.

PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE HOMELESS DID MORE THAN ANYTHING TO CHANGE THE PUBLIC ATTITUDE.

These two approaches played upon Americans' altruism and individualism, and both were quite successful for a time. The homeless-rights agenda advanced with little opposition during most of the eighties. This was in no small part because of the media's active assistance. TV news shows in the 1980s regularly included features about "life on the streets," describing the hardships of this new class of paupers.

Interspersed with these stories were favorable profiles of activists. The late Mitch Snyder became the most famous, distinguished by his trademark camouflage apparel and his undocumented estimate of three million homeless Americans.

Elected officials responded to rising public concern by creating new government programs to aid the homeless. At the federal level, these efforts culminated in the McKinney Act, which was signed into law in 1987 and coordinated federal homeless-assistance programs. In New York City, spending on homeless families soared from $18 million in 1982 to $290 million in 1993. Several other major cities enacted "right-to-shelter" mandates, such as Initiative 17 in Washington, D.C., passed by the voters in 1984.

But Americans, as might be expected, eventually grew curious about this unusual new group of welfare recipients. It was this curiosity that proved the homeless movement's undoing. As the cliché among lawyers goes, 80 percent of a case is the facts; and save for the mentally ill, homeless activists had a challenging clientele to portray in a sympathetic light. They also had to contend with a wave of studies that drew unflattering conclusions about the homeless.

A few academics defied the dogma of the day and investigated the claims that the homeless were ordinary people who had suffered temporary financial misfortune. Many, it turned out instead, were convicted criminals. In the late 80s, Peter Rossi, a sociologist at the University of Massachusetts, analyzed 16 studies and found that about 40 percent of the homeless had actually spent time in jail or prison.

Alice Baum and Donald Burnes, authors of *A Nation in Denial: The Truth About Homelessness*, estimated that up to 83 percent of the homeless were either alcoholic, drug-addicted, mentally ill, or some combination of the three. Even the Cuomo Commission, a homeless study group headed by Andrew Cuomo, the governor's son, discovered in 1992 that 80 percent of New York's homeless who were given urinalysis tested positive for illegal drugs, mostly cocaine.

As time went on, it also became ever more apparent that there was no credible causal link between the budgetary policies of the Reagan administration and the growth of the homeless population. Federal housing subsidies for low-income families rose in real terms by over 50 percent during the 1980s. Economics was relevant to the alleged crisis only to the extent that economic incentives lured more and more people into a life of homelessness.

While, for instance, the number of shelter beds in America rose in the 1980s from 98,000 to 275,000, the new beds were promptly occupied without any appreciable reduction in the homeless population. In a 1988 study of New York City's shelters, 90 percent of the families arriving were found to be receiving welfare benefits already; they were drawn to the shelters by the offer of free housing. Journalists chuckled and feigned horror when President Reagan suggested, in oft-quoted remarks, that some people choose such a lifestyle. By the end of Reagan's tenure, the data were starting to bear him out.

These studies confirmed what the public had already figured out firsthand. Personal encounters with the homeless proved even more important to the change in public attitude than these scholarly labors. Americans who, in response to this apparent crisis,

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had been more generous with their dollar bills for a while learned to save them for reputable charities. An offer to buy a homeless person some food would frequently be met with a scoff or a renewed plea for money; the money was in fact being sought to procure alcohol or feed some other vice. Public complaints grew louder about aggressive panhandling, exemplified by the squeegee men who expected to be paid by gridlocked commuters for washing the windshields they had just doused with dirty water or mixtures of water and urine.

For a while, the gentle term "homeless" worked magically to transform those it described into simple victims without fault for their situation. But the term and the movement that bore its name did not square with reality. Americans came to believe that, in the language of the streets, they were being conned.

Even homeless activists, in moments of candor, would confess deceit. Robert Hayes, director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, admitted in 1989 that homeless advocates had sought to suppress facts about the criminal and drug-dependent nature of many of the homeless. He explained to the *New York Times* that the activists "feared that the public would lose its sympathy for the homeless."

By 1990, the size of the homeless population was demonstrated persuasively to be but a small percentage of what activists claimed. The Bush administration directed the Census Bureau to undertake a special one-night count of the homeless in March 1990, by combing streets and shelters after hours. The bureau found only about 230,000 homeless, a figure revised later to 240,000. Martha Burt, director of the Urban Institute's social-services research program, estimated in 1991 that the homeless population probably ranged from 354,700 to 461,800. What had once looked like a huge national problem suddenly appeared to be much more manageable. The homeless amounted to only a fraction of one percent of Americans, and a deeply troubled, unusual fraction at that.

The press, for its part, eventually grew cynical. In July 1990, following Mitch Snyder's suicide, homeless activists seeking a more generous right-to-shelter law in Washington attended a meeting of the D.C. Board of Elections. There, they placed an urn containing Snyder's ashes before the group, explaining that they wished him to be "present" for the assemblage. The article in the *Washington Post* describing this posthumous appearance was tellingly headlined: "Guilt Ploy Tried Again by Homeless."

Unlike the recent civil-rights movements on behalf of racial minorities and women, the homeless-rights movement did not attack any genuine or even plausible injustice as defined by the American majority. Once the public could see through the fog of inflated statistics and misleading press coverage, it saw a manufactured crisis.

Except for the mentally ill, who became pathetic pawns in the debate, the homeless are manifestly not "just like us." They are fellow citizens who deserve our love and compassion. But those same qualities require that they be held to a higher standard than the self-destructive behavior that distinguishes them. The homeless are homeless not because of a cruel twist of fate, but because, by and large, they have turned their backs on their loved ones and communities, preferring to go it alone.

Despite all the misdirection from our society's elites, the American public figured this out in a relatively short span of time. Americans came to realize that their globally famous generosity was being exploited. As this realization set in, passing vagrancy-type laws that could withstand judicial scrutiny became a priority in many areas. Terms like "transient" began to slip back into the public discussion of the issue. And Americans who continue to aid the homeless financially give donations increasingly to established charities such as the Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society ("the Sally" and "Vinnie's," in irreverent street vernacular), to ensure that their money is spent on sustenance instead of addictions.

AMERICANS CAME TO BELIEVE THAT, IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE STREETS, THEY WERE BEING CONNED.

Though the nation has learned a costly lesson from the "homeless" experience of the 1980s and from the billions of dollars lost along the way, it may yet prove to have been a salutary lesson. We are rediscovering the rationale for the vagrancy laws that safeguarded Western societies for so many centuries. If we now better understand human nature and the crisis of public order that results from allowing men to follow their antisocial impulses, this cannot be a loss for civilization. And if homelessness, as the term is used today, no longer seems to preoccupy us, it is not because we concluded that we should not care about the homeless. It is because we got to know them better. ♦

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THE BOOK ON WHITEWATER

By Robert D. Novak

James Stewart, the celebrated investigative reporter, has performed a remarkable job of reconstructing the Whitewater affair in *Blood Sport* (Simon & Schuster, 479 pages, $25). But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the book has been the reaction to it.

President Clinton's press secretary, Mike McCurry, concluded that Stewart "found precious little news to impart to his readers." Liberal columnists agreed. Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post* contended that "you will find very little to clarify what Whitewater is all about" and suggested that if Stewart "could not find a clearly defined scandal . . . it is not likely anyone else will." Frank Rich of the *New York Times* trumpeted that Stewart "has not uncovered a smoking gun" and concluded: "After four years of this soap opera, aren't we back where we came in?"

Even journalists less sensitive to the fate of the Clintons tend to agree. Maureen Dowd, who does not spare the president in her *New York Times* column, wrote about the "cheesiness" of the first family's dealings but agreed with McCurry that "it's the same old story." *Wall Street Journal* editor Robert Bartley, who has managed his editorial page's relentless pursuit of the Whitewater story, wrote that he "suspects" Clinton confidante Susan Thomases, who had originally sought out Stewart to do a whitewash, "is far from distraught" with the book that resulted.

I respectfully disagree. The Clinton team has reacted to *Blood Sport* with a shrug and the equivalent of "So what?" But that is how they have reacted to all Whitewater revelations. As for reviewers and analysts who agree, I cannot imagine what book they are reading (or perhaps *not* reading). Furthermore, I cannot imagine that anybody could read this book carefully without finally understanding, Richard Cohen to the contrary, what Whitewater "is all about." It is about greed, deception, and cheap politics. Nor can I imagine that any American could read this without coming away with some sense of revulsion about the president and the first lady.

THE CLINTON TEAM HAS REACTED TO JAMES STEWART'S *BLOOD SPORT* WITH A SHRUG AND THE EQUIVALENT OF 'SO WHAT?' BUT THAT IS HOW THEY HAVE REACTED TO ALL WHITEWATER NEWS.

What's more, this is not the final word on Whitewater. Stewart's story ends two years ago, and a lot has happened since. Municipal judge Bill Watt, who last week gave important testimony for the prosecution in the current Whitewater trial in Little Rock, is not mentioned. Nor is Secret Service officer Henry O'Neill, who testified last year about files' being removed from Vincent Foster's office the night of his death.

Stewart does disappoint conspiracy theorists by concluding that Foster did commit suicide. He also asserts there was no massive plundering of the Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan to finance Whitewater. Nevertheless, the claim that Stewart's findings rule out criminal prosecution is false. Rather, the lawyer-journalist writes that the Clintons' Whitewater activities "are covered by a network of criminal and civil laws." Have these laws been broken and has there been obstruction of justice? "Ultimately," Stewart replies, "a grand jury and the independent counsel will make that decision, and decide whether in their discretion, any further charges should be filed, against either the President or the First Lady or others."

Blood Sport may prove of help to the prosecutors. Senate investigators have already acknowledged that there is new information in the book, and they are calling new witnesses based on what they have learned from it. But the broader contribution of the book must be evaluated by considering the source.

While avowing nonpartisanship, Stewart is a registered New York City Democrat who voted for Clinton in 1992. More significantly, he became a hero of the Left for his *Wall Street Journal* coverage of the insider-trading scandals of the 1980s, which won him a Pulitzer Prize, and for his assault on financier Michael Milken in his bestselling *Den of Thieves*. So crude a politico as Susan Thomases

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might well have expected soft treatment from Stewart.

What she in fact got was a degree of objectivity (a despised word in journalistic circles today) that is rare in analyses of Whitewater. Never before in my 39 years as a Washington reporter have I seen a congressional investigation with no bipartisan overlap. The Republicans are out to get the Clintons, the Democrats are out to save them. In contrast to his brutal animus against Milken in *Den of Thieves*, Stewart in *Blood Sport* clearly has no ax to grind and derived his book's title from Foster's plea that, in Washington, "ruining people is considered sport."

Stewart's conclusions are significant. He argues that "the Clintons seized what seemed to be opportunities to make easy money, even when that meant accepting favors or special treatment from people in business regulated by the state. . . . Their handling of the Whitewater investment verges on reckless." Making clear that Mrs. Clinton simply was not telling the truth when she denied close involvement in Whitewater, he asserts that the Clintons' professed "ignorance" of their responsibilities as investors "seems willful."

"Perhaps the full story would have cost the Clintons the election," he writes. "The fierce effort to contain the story suggests that the Clintons thought it would." Are those the words of a Clinton apologist?

In addition to objectivity, Stewart provides readability. He is the rare investigator who can explain very complicated matters without dense rhetoric. Whitewater, ignored for a decade by the Arkansas journalists who now loudly contend that there is no story, was brought to light by the trailblazing work of Jeff Gerth in the *New York Times*. When Gerth's first story on Whitewater was published in 1992, Stewart writes, "Thomases was thrilled. She thought it was incomprehensible." It was, in truth, hard going.

That cannot be said of Stewart's story, which is dramatic from its scene-setting opening chapter detailing the events following Foster's death. The lack of cooperation and candor of Clinton administration officials began immediately at the Foster home. Stewart's storytelling skill has helped make *Blood Sport* a bestseller, but for Whitewater investigators and close followers of the scandal, there is lots of new information.

Of the 16 new witnesses announced for the next phase of the Senate Whitewater Committee hearings, eight are the result of Stewart's work.

I CANNOT IMAGINE ANYBODY READING THIS BOOK AND NOT FINALLY UNDERSTANDING WHAT WHITEWATER IS ALL ABOUT. IT IS ABOUT GREED, DECEPTION, AND CHEAP POLITICS.

An example: William Henley, brother of Whitewater partner Susan McDougal. Investigators learned from the book that Henley and Mrs. McDougal were present when Gov. Clinton jogged by and asked his Whitewater partner James McDougal to send some business from the troubled Madison Guaranty to Hillary Clinton at the Rose Law Firm.

Nothing new in this book? Here are a few of the new tidbits that Stewart has served up for investigators—smoking guns, no, but fascinating details:

- In late 1981, James McDougal told his loan officer at Union Bank that Madison S&L was not so much a bank as a "candy store."
- Rose Law partner David Knight was present at a spring 1985 luncheon meeting held by John Latham of Madison Guaranty and Richard Massey of Rose. Knight is one of the new witnesses called by the Senate.
- In 1985, when the McDougals talked about getting out of Whitewater, Mrs. Clinton refused. "Jim told me that this was going to pay for college for Chelsea," she said. "I still expect it to do that!"
- The Twin City Bank in 1987 gave the Clintons an extension on their Whitewater loan, personally negotiating with Hillary and not requiring a financial disclosure. On the same day, Gov. Clinton signed a bill providing special treatment for the bank.
- Worthen Bank CEO Curt Bradbury received a telephone call from a "panicked" Gov. Clinton just before the 1990 elections saying, "I need $100,000" to pay off a personal loan.
- In 1992, Thomases received a telephone call from Mrs. Clinton, "who was beside herself," saying that reporter Gerth had stumbled onto a "stupid" investment that she and the governor had made.

What is most fascinating is that Stewart was able to mine new information from a vein that the president's defenders have claimed was depleted long ago. One of the interested readers of the book is a former independent counsel who told me that, after reading *Blood Sport*, he for the first time saw grounds for criminal indictments and the possibility that independent counsel Kenneth Starr would name Hillary Rodham Clinton as an unindicted co-conspirator. Thomases may long rue the day that she sought out Jim Stewart. ♦

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Books

WASP PARTY ANIMAL

By Charles McCarry

Unlike London or Baghdad or Paris or even Prague, Washington has not generated a great literature about itself. Intellectuals have suggested that this is because it is less interesting than other seats of government, but the truth may be that the American capital has no need to fictionalize itself. It is already a living novel—a sort of never-ending Pilgrim's Progress in which Bunyanesque characters (Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Despair, Great-heart, Foul Fiend, et al.) pop out of nowhere when their hour strikes, achieve great things and/or come to tragicomic ends as a result of fate, human folly, or blind coincidence, then vanish back into the mind of America until it is time for them to be reincarnated under a different name in a new edition of a tale that is always the same yet always somehow amusingly new.

The press, as keeper of the spirit pen, usually assigns the roles in this revolving fable. But occasionally a minor character invents himself. On the evidence of Robert W. Merry's remarkable new book, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop—Guardians of the American Century* (Viking, 644 pages, $34.95), the late Joe Alsop, bard of the Anglo-Saxon Ascendancy, was one of these. After suffering the early torments of a fat bookworm (230 lbs. as a 5-foot-10 senior at Groton), he was admitted to Harvard largely on the strength of a dazzling entrance-exam essay and "began to accentuate the things that made him distinctive—his theatrical mannerisms, the tossed-off witticisms, and the diction of the British upper classes with elongated vowels and clipped consonants."

This new self that Joe let loose—fop, snob, sycophant, wild talker and quirky thinker—amused the circle of top people to which he wished to belong, and in his sophomore year he was tapped for the Porcellian Club. Thus powerfully encouraged, he stayed with the impersonation for the rest of his life. In due course, naturally, he became the ridiculous yet lethal thing he pretended to be, a sort of Falstaff-as-Pimpernel who "divided people into two groups—his friends, for whose friendship the price was never too high, and all others, for whom he had little time or courtesy."

Merry, a onetime *Wall Street Journal* reporter who is now executive editor of the *Congressional Quarterly*, has resisted what must have been a strong temptation to let Joe run away with his book. Instead, he has written a resonant, brilliantly reported account of the last days of the old-family, old-money Anglo-Saxon elite that regarded itself as "a dedicated, intelligent, and honest aristocracy" whose mission on earth was to run the United States of America.

Then as now, of course, the American democracy was usually governed, and its culture and commerce dominated, by nobodies from nowhere, while the products of St. Grottlesex and the Ivy League, like the English public-school types on whom they were modeled, rattled around in the second and third drawers from the top. Very few people emigrated to the American colonies in order to escape from the wealth and position they enjoyed in the British Isles, and most of the Wasp gentry, including the Alsops, had little or no idea where or what they came from.

Nevertheless, as Merry points

Chas Fagan

Joseph and Stewart Alsop

Charles McCarry is the author of Shelley's Heart *and seven other novels.*

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out, well-to-do Americans with English surnames were, as a class, great Tories. Few were more theologically Anglophile than the Alsops, whose own name, like that of an English landmark, was pronounced in a way that could not easily be deduced from its spelling. They had been in the New World for 250 years, but the family history suggests that this was a physical and not a psychological condition. One 18th-century forebear had refused to sign the Declaration of Independence on grounds that it was a treasonous document; another founded the Alsop fortune by shipping ice from the Connecticut River to the West Indies.

For a generation or two the family had been very well-off, but by the time Joseph Wright Alsop, V was born in 1910 and his younger brother, Stewart Johonnet Oliver, came into the world four years later, Alsops had to work for a living. The question was, At what? Their father was a gentleman farmer and insurance man who grew tobacco and dairy cattle on a 150-acre place in Avon, Connecticut. Their mother, a member of the rich New York Robinson family, was a niece of Theodore Roosevelt and therefore a first cousin of Eleanor Roosevelt Roosevelt, whose husband was elected president in 1932.

As Joe approached graduation from Harvard in that same year, a family council on his future concluded that he was qualified for none of the usual occupations of a gentleman. Joe's Grandmother Robinson, noting his flair for words, thought that he might make a journalist. She had a word with her friend Helen Reid, whose family owned the *New York Herald-Tribune*, and Joe was hired as a cub reporter at $18 a week.

If the rest is not exactly history, it is certainly the stuff of legend. Condescending to nearly every subject he approached, from the homeless of the Great Depression to the Lindbergh kidnapping (he compared Bruno Hauptmann to Polonius) to Henri Matisse, whose broken English amused him, he quickly made a name and a style for himself as a writer of feature stories that must have seemed lighthearted at the time but would nowadays more accurately be called heartless.

Sent to Washington by the *Trib*, young Joe looked up Cousin Eleanor. FDR (who was not tapped for the Porc when he was at Harvard) succumbed to Joe's power to amuse, and soon this bizarre young cousin was a regular at family dinners, including Christmas dinners, in the White House. The Roosevelts' famously awful food was a condign misery for the burgeoning gastronome who later in life refused to eat in any restaurant along the Champs Elysées because, he explained, the underground trains of the Paris Metro agitated their wine cellars.

The president became Joe's source, and his patronage opened doors in the administration and got him invited to parties where he met, and usually charmed, Washington's social lions. Joe repaid FDR with sympathetic coverage in the *Herald-Tribune* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. His articles, while not omitting a legitimating word or two of criticism, portrayed Roosevelt's plan to pack the Supreme Court as a Homeric struggle between a selfless, heroic president and "the shabby comedy of national politics with its all-pervading motive, self-interest."

The *Saturday Evening Post* article, a three-parter written with Mississippian Turner Catledge of the *New York Times*, established a lifelong reluctance to fly solo over defended ground, and from then on Joe almost always wrote in partnership. This early collaboration led to a book contract with Doubleday, whose vice president, Joe's Uncle Ted Roosevelt, felt sure that the

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resulting volume would win next year's $2,500 Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Book Award. It didn't, but within the year Joe was offered a syndicated column. When Catledge turned down his invitation to co-author the column, Joe recruited in his stead another plebe, a workaholic *Herald-Tribune* reporter from Swarthmore named Robert Kintner.

Soon 60 papers were carrying the new team's "The Capital Parade." On the side Alsop and Kintner contributed magazine pieces, including a worshipful article in *Life* entitled "Roosevelt Family Album" that included such subheads as "FDR: Child of a Vanished Race." Joe moved into a house in Georgetown, furnished it with antiques from the family attics, and—establishing another lifetime pattern—"pursued lively dinner guests with the zeal of an ardent suitor." Those who succumbed, if they were eminent enough, were treated to gushing morning-after letters of thanks from the host.

The famous responded warmly to this flattery, and the Journalist-as-Party-Animal was added to the permanent cast of Washington characters. Evelyn Waugh, who was turning his own obsession with his betters into art at about the same time that Joe was transmogrifying his into journalism, sourly remarked that Communist-hunting Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy had given good work a bad name.

It might be said of Joe Alsop, a determined enemy and almost-victim of McCarthy, that he did the opposite by making himself the creature of the milieu he was describing to the world. By reporting from the inside, as an honorary equal, that which had usually before been reported from the outside by newspapermen who had much more in common with cops and firemen than with Bissells and Bohlens, he became a hostage to his informants. Not for Joe was Emerson's description of the *Times* of London in 1848 as an institution "in antagonism with the feudal institutions, mak[ing] the public a more terrible spy than any foreigner." Instead, Merry tells us, Alsop enjoyed the distinction of knowing everyone, of being loved by many, and of having his copy edited personally by the two presidents he admired most, FDR and JFK.

Merry's gentle but unsparing portrait of Joe rises so vividly out of the original that the reader notices only gradually that, as in a Velazquez, the most interesting figure in the painting is the one standing slightly out of the light and a bit behind the egoist in the foreground—in this case, Joe's last literary collaborator, Brother Stewart. After a lifetime devoted to making Joe complete by acting the depressive to the former's manic persona, Stewart finally broke free and before he died too young, emerged as one of the most iconoclastic reporters of his time. Writing in the full heat of Watergate, he said, "The time may come when the ox to be gored is not the detested Mr. Nixon's, but a fine liberal ox. The wholesale leaking by the secret police and the grand jury, and the eager acceptance of turncoat testimony, may then appear to liberals in a rather different light."

Much else that Stewart wrote toward the end of his life remains worth reading. Joe is interesting not for what he knew but for whom he knew. He might not have been happy to have his life summed up in such a commonplace, but Merry makes us understand that that was all he ever really wanted.

In Joe's memory, a one-week moratorium on parties should be called in Washington while every insider reads this book. ♦

Books

HER WAR WITH THE GOP

By Heather R. Higgins

You have to feel sorry for Democrats, what with 200 of their elected officials switching parties since Clinton was elected and almost no Republicans returning the compliment. So it's not surprising that Frank Rich rushed to embrace Tanya Melich and her "profusely documented, tell-all account," *The Republican War Against Women: An Insider's Report from Behind the Lines* (Bantam, 356 pages, $23.95). Rich and others who champion this book, however, face a wee problem: The documentation is shoddy and highly selective, the tales that get told are so flagrantly revisionist that even a political amateur would smirk, the premise depends on Orwellian doublespeak, and the "insider" simply isn't. In short, this is not a serious book making a legitimate argument. Nor is it a true insider's account with genuine revelations and fresh information. Rather, it is a screed, a long whine, with the intellectual depth of a wading pool.

Start with the word "misogynist," which appears nearly 70 times in one form or another, for an average of once every four pages. Silly you if you thought it meant someone who hates or distrusts

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women. No, here a "misogynist" is anyone who disagrees with the liberal policies Melich advocates. Equally original is Melich's standard for gauging the Republican party's "assault on women." It takes no account of real gains by women in the party hierarchy, but only measures gains by the *right kind* of woman—the pro-choice kind. And even the appointment of the right kind of woman doesn't quite count for Melich unless the women in question are "placed in a position to affect reproductive health policy." It's rather like calling the Democratic party racist, with racist redefined to mean anything Thomas Sowell would disagree with, and racist behavior the appointment of anyone other than black individuals, who hold Sowell's views, to positions responsible for race-related matters.

The misuse of language to vilify the majority of Republicans only begins with "misogynist" and its close companions "bigot," "hater," "racist," and "zealot," to name a few. Democrats, by the way, are spared these epithets. When they agree with Republican positions on particular issues, they are at worst motivated by "genuine conviction" (Sam Ervin, who opposed the ERA) or "sanctimonious" (Carter, who wouldn't fight for federal funding for abortions). Words like "vindictive," "vicious," and "virulent" Melich saves for Republicans and their party of "theocrats and the usual unprincipled power seekers." Her disdain for accuracy and subtlety, however, really shines in her historical analogies.

Thus, President Bush instituted "policies that sought to relegate women to their pre-Enlightenment status." (Just in case women were wondering where our property, suffrage, and right to divorce went.) At the International Women's Year conference in Houston, women "argued about . . . the stereotyping of women into traditional roles. 'How can I stop my husband from beating me?' they asked." (Ah, yes, the favorite traditional role—and no stereotypes here.) The harassment of Geraldine Ferraro by the Reagan team proceeded "with the same ferocity exhibited 300 years ago by the 'good Puritans' of Salem." (And the same legitimacy, too.) Bush's veto of the Civil Rights Act of 1990 was "only the third time in American history that a president had vetoed a civil rights bill. [The first was] in 1866 when Andrew Johnson vetoed legislation giving civil rights protection to the newly freed slaves." (And you thought Republicans only wanted to go back to the 1950s!)

Kent Lemon

Tanya Melich

Elsewhere, Melich practices revision by omission. Examples abound. As a member of the Coalition Against Bork, she knows better than to present as legitimate the deliberate distortions of Bork's opinions that were used to slander him during his confirmation process. But she never acknowledges that the behavior of the opposition was so extreme and indifferent to truth as to produce a new verb: to bork. Rather, Melich for once discovers understatement, noting that while the hearings may have been "less civilized than many in the past," the vituperativeness was wholly the fault of Republicans who were trying to "pack" the court to "reflect their views of justice."

Geraldine Ferraro's nomination restores to Melich "dreams assaulted by the Reagan years"—but her candidacy is recounted as a simple tale of bigots and misogynists seizing on the little "wrinkle" of the candidate's "husband not wanting to release his tax returns" and using this to attack Ferraro because she is Italian, a Catholic (the good, pro-choice kind), and a woman. Of what those tax returns ultimately revealed, as well as what other evidence (as opposed to "innuendo") turned up, there is not a whisper.

But abortion is the area where Melich's inability to see beyond her prejudices is most evident. Whatever one's position on the issue, it is hard to ignore the fact that for right-to-lifers, abortion is a moral issue; to them, any "right" to choose abortion is as meaningless as a property "right" to own slaves. Yet Melich contends that what really motivates pro-lifers are concerns like states rights, political timing, and party loyalty—with barely a mention of anything more profound.

Nor does she recognize that public sentiment on abortion is complicated and nuanced, distributed along a bell curve, depending on why and at what stage an abortion is sought. While quick to cite public opinion whenever it supports her views, Melich conveniently forgets about it when propounding her own vehement opposition to

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popular measures such as parental notification, restricted federal funding, waiting periods, and testing for fetal viability. She asserts that these constitute gross infringements of reproductive freedom. Indeed, the "individual freedom of women to make their own reproductive choices [is] bedrock Republican philosophy," she announces, and "each person must follow his or her own conscience." But this is not an argument. After all, in her Wendell Willkie childhood, laws governing all sorts of personal behavior, from loitering to abortion, were on the books and widely accepted, by her party and everyone else.

In any case, "reproductive choice" logically resides at intercourse, which is why contraception is widely approved. Abortion is different. What we are wrestling with as a nation and what the Republican party is discussing internally is when, if ever, and under what circumstances a decision to abort is morally acceptable and should be legally permissible. It is a nuanced question, and Melich does not do it justice.

While Melich claims to be opposed to an intrusive government, she seems to mean it only in the area of abortion. She assures us, for example, that to be truly *uninvolved*, the federal government must pay for abortions. In fact a liberal moving under cover of feminism, she favors government intrusion and spending, whether in the guise of affirmative action, "extension" of the Equal Pay Act, federal funding for and regulation of day care, and, apparently, all other entitlements and social spending. (Yes, the predictable denunciation of those cruel Reagan spending cuts is here, along with a contradictory concern about rising deficits.) As for House speaker Newt Gingrich (who sends "misogynist and racist messages"), his Opportunity Society "will limit women's right to reproductive choice, eliminate affirmative action, punish poor women for having children, and make life more miserable for women in general." In short, it's hard to tell why Melich was a Republican for so long.

What she certainly is, however, is a Victim. Whenever Melich's side loses a fight over policy, she tells us that "the misogynist strategy worked." When someone she disapproves of wins an election, it's the fault of "incumbency and regional bias." When a woman is criticized for the policies she espouses, her critics are "anti-woman" and "extremists" who have "women as a particular target" or "don't want to share power." Anyone who makes a principled argument for a position Melich disagrees with is merely "cloaking attacks in a mantle of religiosity and morality." When conservative women are highly regarded, whether Phyllis Schlafly, Jeane Kirkpatrick, or the current Republican congresswomen, they are being used or "co-opted." It's a simplistic view, a world where the typical choice is "between a misogynist fiscal conservative and a feminist moderate"—but it's the only paradigm that allows this rancorous woman to avoid confronting herself.

Looking ahead, Melich anticipates that women will punish Republicans at the polls in '96. But throughout her book she admits time and again that her predictions have been wrong, the product of wishful thinking and other forms of self-delusion. Indeed, she lays out a record of astonishing consistency, a particularly brave admission for someone who apparently runs a political consulting firm. So as Tanya Melich closes the door on her "birthright Republicanism," let all good Republicans hope that she prospers—as a consultant to Democrats. ♦

Movies

No Psycho, No Drama

By Christopher Caldwell

In *Money*, Martin Amis described how Broadway, curving through Manhattan, "always contrives to be just that little bit *shittier* than the zones through which it bends." In like fashion, American directors continue to cut a swath through the entire repertoire of French cinema, copying classic films. Almost without exception, the new versions, while not bad, are just that little bit coarser than the originals. The latest of these is *Diabolique*, a remake of Henri-Georges Clouzot's Hitchcockian thriller *Les Diaboliques* (1955). As executive producer James G. Robinson said, he and his director, fashion photographer Jeremiah Chechik, hope "to bring the story and characters into the nineties."

Guy Baran (Chazz Palminteri) runs a third-rate boys' school somewhere outside of Pittsburgh. He tyrannizes the students, beats his wife Mia (Isabelle Adjani) silly, and humiliates her publicly, even obliquely derogating her sexual technique over dinner at high table. She's a flighty ex-nun with a heart condition, and the slightest shock could kill her. Guy treats his mistress Nicole (Sharon Stone) little better.

Nicole is the cooler of the two

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customers, and Stone plays an excellent bitch. The temptation in such roles is to camp it up, to spit out one's lines with sassy self-satisfaction, as if bitchery were a subcategory of wit. Stone understands, on the contrary, that genuine bitches are quick thinkers only in matters that affect their own interest. In other matters the operative mood is one of luggish, stolid piggyness.

Unluckily for Guy, Nicole is Mia's confidante and best friend. Just minutes into the movie, smarting over their respective physical and psychic wounds, they are commiserating about Guy's abuse. And with Nicole doing most of the urging, they decide to knock him off. They drug his Scotch, drown him in the tub, load him into a wicker basket, and dump him into the school swimming pool.

Then evidence begins to surface that Guy isn't quite dead.

In the original film, this occasioned real moral meditation, as the pious Venezuelan wife was overcome with fears of damnation. But ordinary religious responses would be so anomalous in a film for the nineties that Mia is made an ex-nun and goes through all sorts of candle-lighting mumbo-jumbo that has more in common with voodoo than with any recognizable Catholicism.

"It's lonely without God," Nicole remarks, but all the theology does is render the film slightly pompous. It's also a waste of time, since this movie already *has* a faith behind it: viz., feminism of the "gender" variety. And that is a faith that offers plenty of absolution. "You're feeling guilty," says a detective (Kathy Bates) working the case. "It's not your fault. It's men. Testosterone. They should put it in bombs." At one point, Nicole tells Mia, "I'm not sorry. And neither are you, if you think about it. Killing him is a good thing."

The dialogue occasionally refutes the idea that feminism and humor are incompatible. A young tramp named Lisa appears at the school one afternoon to report that Guy has knocked her up and to demand money for an abortion. Mia says, "Abortion is murder." To which Lisa replies: "Well, I'm gonna have an anesthetic, for God's sake!"

Sharon Stone in Diabolique: *Perfecting the art of bitchery*

But predictably, the men are either sadistic perverts or impotent wussies who deserve to die. "Twenty bucks they killed him . . . *Dykes*," says a workman watching Mia and Nicole emerge from the school building. This, we are given to understand, is what men always say when they lack the testosterone to get a woman into bed.

And there's a case to be made that the amount of tender touching between Mia and Nicole *is* meant to imply a blossoming of The Love That Dare Not Endanger Box-Office Receipts. Bringing something into the nineties, to use producer Robinson's phrase, is generally a euphemism for taking all its main characters and turning them into homosexuals.

More likely, director Chechik simply figured that, if you've got Sharon Stone and Isabelle Adjani in the same movie, you might as well have them paw each other a bit.

However sexual the bond, it is undoubtedly "sisterhood"—a keen appreciation of what scumbags men are—that draws the killers closer as the noose tightens around them. This growing tenderness between the two women is the signal innovation in the American version. To accommodate it, the original ending—among the most brilliant in film history—must be sacrificed. Once that has been done, the rest of the action, pretty much unchanged from the French version, makes no sense. The characters' motivations come unhinged from their actions, leaving a psychodrama without psychology. ♦

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"As I have said a thousand times, I will cut the grass, I will take out the trash, I will sleep under a bridge. I cannot live with the thought that we don't pass on a better, stronger country to our children."
— *Ross Perot,* Dallas Morning News, *March 21, 1996*

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CITY OF DALLAS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ARREST REPORT

■ Subject's Name: H. Ross Perot | ■ Date of Arrest: 11 November 1996 | ■ Time: 0400

■ Charges: Violation of 21 U.S.C. 692 @ Sec. 394: Vagrancy;Sleeping Under a Bridge.

■ Sex/Race/DOB: M | 1 | 28 | Mar 31 | ■ Weapons Recovered: one (1) weed whacker

■ Description of Arrest:

On today's date at approx. 0400 hours officers, of the Dallas Police Department conducted routine patrols on and around Route 19 overpass. Officers observed a short, crew-cut individual asleep under aforementioned bridge span. Subject was awakened. Subject appeared dazed and spoke in a phony high-pitched voice. Appeared to be wearing false ears as disguise.

Subject spoke rapidly. He said unnamed "volunteers" asked him to take out trash and cut grass so that arresting officers' grandchildren would have a stronger America. Subject grew suspicious and said he had seen both officers at his daughter's wedding. At this point officers confiscated subject's weed whacker.

Subject told officers he had run for president and had once tried to buy General Motors. At this point in time, Mental Health Agency clinicians were called. At 0430 hours clinician Nguyen Ky arrived. Subject accused clinician Ky of running across his lawn at midnight several years ago. Subject asked to see clinician Ky's backside for teeth marks left by guard dog. Clinician Ky advised that subject be placed in custody.

Subject was informed of his rights. Per procedure, subject was allowed one phone call. Subject placed call to a Mr. Larry King, Washington, D.C. Mr. King informed officers that detention facility personnel would find that subject was a "terrific guest."

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■ Reporting Officer's Name:(please print) | ■ Unit Notified | ■ Time:

■ Notifications, if appropriate, made by:

■ Date of Supv. Approval/Time: | ■ Case Status:

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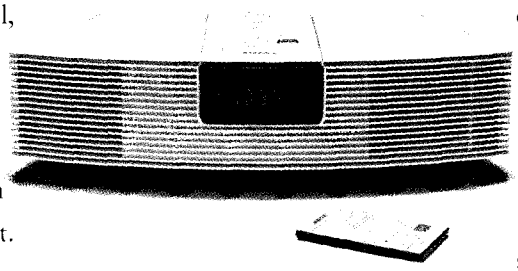

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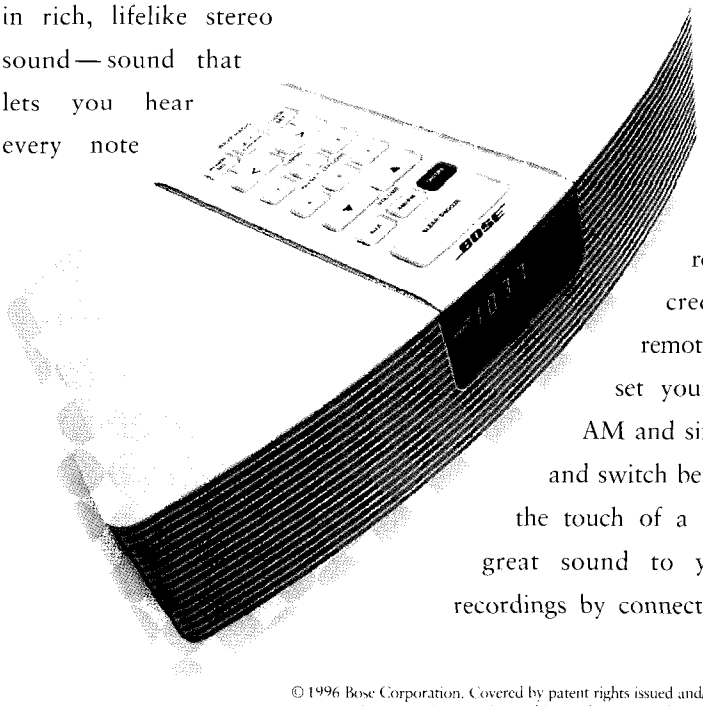

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